The future of electronic entertainment issue#110

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Edge reveals the fin
videogame achiever
from the last 12 mor

Previewed: Ghost Ma
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Reviewed: GC Bioha
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Minority groups and g

THE AWARDS ISSUE







Yes, it has been a year already. Where *Phantasy Star Online*, *Deus Ex*, *Jet Set Radio*, *Alien Resurrection*, Sega and Sonic Team stood towering above the videogaming community at the **Edge** Awards 2001 (**E**97), you'll now find a new selection of winners and runners-up from the past 12 months of electronic entertainment (p54). If you've been paying attention for the last 13 issues, some, such as Game of the Year, won't come as surprise. Others might.

Statistically, it's been a worse year for gaming. More titles covered but only seven nine out of tens and 29 eights compared with nine and 36, respectively, for the 2001 awards. But then, 2001 didn't have *Halo*. All in all, for a period that has seen the closure of several developers, the termination of various projects, the death of two formats and the eventual delivery of another two – a period of hardware transition that has traditionally crippled the gaming community, let's not forget – the last 365 days have provided some surprisingly fine examples of videogaming. Signs of an industry on the road to recovery are now clear.

But there's also an almost palpable hint of an industry that is (slowly) maturing – one that has come out of a difficult year with seemingly better perception. True, as highlighted last month the path to cultural recognition remains a long one (and that won't genuinely happen until the next console generation, at least) but steps are being taken. Even this issue's article on how the disabled and minority communities are catered for by game publishers/developers (p12 and 72), although naturally critical of the (too) little work that has been done to date in these areas, reveal a business that would appear on the brink of significant alteration.

Just how significant, particularly with regards to general gaming, only time will tell. But with three strong contenders raising their game in an attempt to secure the best grid position for the next hardware race, gamers are the ones most likely to benefit. But you'll have to wait for **E**123 to find out how many eights, nines and tens that will translate into.



Features


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054


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Editorial
Future Publishing
30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW
Telephone 01225 442244
Fax 01225 732275
Email edge@futurenet.co.uk
Edge Website www.edge-online.com

People on Edge
João Diniz-Sanches editor
Terry Stokes art editor
Scott Bradbury production editor
David McCarthy news editor
Ste Curran reviews editor
Mark Walbank features editor
Darren Phillips deputy art editor
Christophe Kagotani Tokyo bureau

Contributors
Matthew Bloch, Chris Buxton, Tristan Donovan, Tim Guest, Jon Jordan, Lupin Kojima, Peter Lyle, Tony Mott, Toshihiro Nagoshi, Matthew Pierce, Steven Poole, RedEye

Production
Kirsty Bell senior production coordinator
Rose Griffiths production manager

Circulation
Tom Shaw product manager
Regina Erak circulation manager

Advertising
Jayne Caple deputy advertising director
Claire Hawkins advertising manager
Phil Jones senior sales executive
Advertising phone 01225 732218

Publishing
Steve Jarratt group senior editor
Ian Miller group art editor
James Binns publisher
Tamara Longden promotions manager
Simon Wear overseas licensing
David Maher-Roberts group publishing direc

Subscriptions & distribution
Future Publishing Ltd
FREEPOST BS4900, Somerton TA11 7BR
Telephone 01458 271184
Fax 01225 822523
Email edge.subs@futurenet.co.uk

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Distribution, 86 Newman Street, London W1
Telephone 0207 907 6000

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Senior management
Roger Parry non-executive chairman
Greg Ingham chief executive
Colin Morrison chief operating officer & MD,

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The 'limousine and paparazzi' issue

















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097

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"Food's on the table, Wyatt."
"Good, Amy. That way we'll know where to find it when we're finished."


XBOX
ON SALE FROM MIDNIGHT
VIRGIN MEGASTORE
Virgin megastore

Xbox UK launch party

Everything went to plan in the US, but the Xbox's sorry start in Japan made the European initiation more important than ever. What better way to create that crucial media frenzy than with a party?

London, the evening of March 13, and Microsoft's black-plastic plan for the future of European gaming finally became tangible. A party at Oxford Street's Virgin Megastore launched the console to press, public and minor celebrities alike, and the venue, clearly chosen for reasons other than its suitability for Partying More, afforded Microsoft a very visible opportunity to split the celebrations in two. The plan was simple enough: upstairs, an array of demo pods awaited those queuing to buy their boxes at midnight, while downstairs those lucky enough to procure an invite to the festivities would mix with machines, celebs, and green-themed snacks and cocktails.

It didn't go smoothly from the start. A curiously unexplained delay at the door meant many of the invited guests waiting to enter the Megastore party found themselves queuing for upwards of an hour outside the venue. While Microsoft was thoughtful enough to provide the waiting crowds with Christmas vol-au-vents, its thoughtfulness did not extend to preventing the waiting photographers from taking pictures of the 'phenomenal' queuing. It didn't reach as far as letting the press know that the lines weren't for the consoles but for the free beer, either. "So X-cited: Punters Queue for their Xboxes" ran a caption in one of the tabloid's the next day. More cynical observers than **Edge** might have suggested that this was an exemplary piece of crowd resource management, particularly given that, at that stage in the evening, there were only two people in the queue for consoles.

Still, anxious blaggers needn't have worried. Once inside the venue, attaining free refreshment was simple, if only because of misplaced televisual distractions. The night of a crucial Champions League game for Liverpool, Microsoft sought to counter the attractions of nearby big-screen pubs by showing the game on a TV in the corner. Unfortunately, since the freeloading element of the assembled guests had but a passing interest in the Xbox at best, all it served to do was create a crush around the TV and an air of apathy around the demo-pods and big-screen *Halo*. By the time the match finished, many people had already left. Perhaps they made the right decision; midway through the evening, power to half of the lighting systems went, halving the number of bars and turning the already-overcrowded gents' toilets into a black-hole ride terminating in some shameful urinal guesswork. **Edge** chose to cross its legs.

As midnight approached, the organisers wheeled out Jonathan Ross – rumoured, variously, to be on a fee of anything between £5,000 and £20,000 – to kickstart the launch fever. Referring to Microsoft's console as "Game Box", he reeled off a couple of mildly offensive one-liners, and disappeared upstairs to play *Dead or Alive 3* against those waiting for the store to open. When the doors did open, there wasn't so much a rush as an anxious shuffle forward from the mix of dedicated gamers and pressured parents, pre-order slips in clenched fists. They needn't have worried; there were plenty of boxes to go round.

Downstairs, Soulwax's excellent DJ set entertained those who remained, but by that time the venue was emptying, quickly. The party, like all console launch parties, was intended to be its fanfare – a show of force in the face of doubters – but there was no real force there; Microsoft shouted as loud as Nintendo and Sony ever did, but a lack of consumer enthusiasm was palpable.



The party, like all launch parties, was intended to be its fanfare – a show of force in the face of doubters – but there was no real force there



Scott Rawlins queued for over five hours to get the first Xbox sold in the UK, and got a limousine ride home for his trouble



The 'Christmas Eve' motif was somewhat stretched, with lime-green Santas arriving an an Xbox APC, and fluorescent Xbox Hare Krishnas distracting passers-by





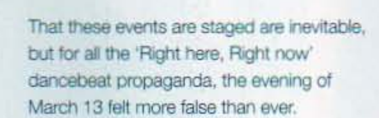




From top: John Simm enjoys a chat; Jonathan Ross enjoys his appearance fee; Paul Oakenfold enjoys a mystery blonde; Johnny Vegas enjoys time away from punters pretending to be Monkey; Lorne Lanning enjoys the Xbox architecture



Richard Branson's appearance at the party caused a little confusion, mostly because of th presence of a hired lookalike. The man who sold the first Xbox was, apparently, the real or

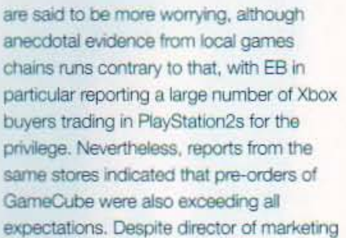


That these events are staged are inevitable, but for all the 'Right here, Right now' dancebeat propaganda, the evening of March 13 felt more false than ever.



Unspectacular sales

It appears the majority of the general public still need some persuading that Xbox is the future. Although Microsoft has yet to release the official number of units shifted, the first week's sales look to have been respectable, but unspectacular, with estimates suggesting figures of 48,000 sold consoles of the 70,000 in stores. It's the following week's hardware and software sales that



are said to be more worrying, although anecdotal evidence from local games chains runs contrary to that, with EB in particular reporting a large number of Xbox buyers trading in PlayStation2s for the privilege. Nevertheless, reports from the same stores indicated that pre-orders of GameCube were also exceeding all expectations. Despite director of marketing **John O'Rourke**'s proclamation that Microsoft was "off to a great start in every region," it's difficult to believe him without adding the suffix "of the United States."

More worrying than the console's sell through, though, is the mass-media's fetish for schadenfreude, particularly when it comes to a potential Microsoft failure. Negative articles – however much based or hearsay and predictive guesswork – are big news to a world that's desperate to see the Redmond giant fail at something. And Microsoft's quest to get the public to believe in the Xbox may depend largely on media reportage and word of mouth.

While the first weeks might not have gone as well as hoped, the Xbox isn't, as reactionary Internet gossips might have it, close to death



Demo pods littered the basement of the Megastore, but that wasn't enough to distract many of the guests from the football. A shame, since the quality of software was excellent

Damning statement

Small wonder, then, that when **John Riccitiello**, EA's president, said "Microsoft has had its teeth kicked in, in both Europe and Japan," in a Bloomberg report dated March 27, all the major news sites across the Web picked up on it with glee. Still, an even more damning statement was buried further down in the report, coming from **Takashi Oya**, an analyst at Deutsche Securities Ltd. "While Xbox had been projected to struggle because of inadequat software and poor brand recognition, the setback is worse than imagined."

Interestingly, there are parallels with the Dreamcast's sales. Sega estimated sales of



The arrival of the Xbox Santas was more confusing than cute. The gaming cognoscenti were much more interested in the presence of Smilebit's Kawagoe Takayuki







Although the organisers achieved much in transforming the Megastore into a viable venue in a short space of time, the event still had that hanging white sheet/school disco feel

4.9m units, but had to reduce that to 4.7m after a particularly poor performance in Japan. Microsoft had hoped to ship 4.5m Xboxes by the end of the fiscal year, but it's rumoured that this estimate may have to drop to 4.3m. What isn't parallel, crucially, is the state of the companies; the thing that killed the Dreamcast was that Sega couldn't afford to continue to make a loss, whereas Microsoft – which has a strong strategic motive for establishing Xbox as a potential thoroughfare to other, more profitable forms of living-room entertainment – can.

The next key date is May 3, the UK launch of the GameCube. Nintendo's first-week sales figures will, naturally, be subject to the same level of spin – both positive and negative – but they should provide a small insight into the future of the European console market. Whatever, happens, though, it's important to state clearly that, while the first weeks might not have gone as well as Microsoft hoped, the Xbox isn't, as reactionary Internet gossips might have it, close to death. Microsoft's battle plan was always to fight a war of attrition, and that's set to be played out fully in the summer months, and the run up to Christmas 2002 and beyond.

















Unsurprisingly, *Halo* was the best selling game during the launch week, with *Project Gotham*, *Amped*, and *Dead or Alive 3* also selling well. Of the thirdparties, Microsoft reported *Max Payne* and *Wreckless* as their stand out titles. Infogrames underestimated the demand for *Jet Set Radio Future*; many gamers had to wait until the publisher manufactured more copies

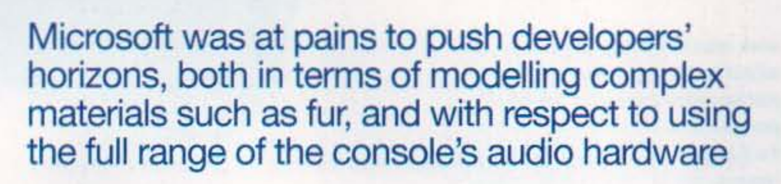
Deep thought at GDC

A contemplative atmosphere characterised the Game Developers Conference in San Jose with academia and game design issues at the fore


Microsoft's Pete Isensee bigged up the Xbox launch during his keynote speech

GDC 2002 was less sexy than previous years, but this was probably because developers were spending less time talking about what they hoped to do and more time actually doing it. Reflecting on the prevailing mood, one of GDC's prominent speakers, **Warren Spector** commented, "I think next year's show should be called 'Pose and Discuss.'" And this measured approach was certainly reflected in the subject matter of the two-day tutorial sessions. One was devoted to game tuning and the other to the role of academia. The game design track of the conference was also strong, with several ambitious lectures attempted.




Microsoft was at pains to push developers' horizons, both in terms of modelling complex materials such as fur, and with respect to using the full range of the console's audio hardware

Noah Falstein revealed more of his 400 rules of game design, while Ernest Adams continued his thought-provoking crusade with, 'Why We Shouldn't Make Games.' Spector, together with cohort Doug Church, led a keynote analysis session comparing the different environmental and skill considerations required of players in the games *Thief* and *Deus Ex*. There was also an abstract experiment by *The Sims'* creator Will Wright in conjunction with cartoonist Scott McCloud. Entitled 'When Maps Collide', it proved to be an interesting if somewhat unscripted investigation into different ways to think about interactivity, linearity and time.

There was a smaller than usual UK and European contingent speaking this year, no doubt reflecting the organiser's keenness to focus on the European version of the conference to be held in London, during August. Bizarre timing saw a whistlestop tour from Peter Molyneux to deliver his 'Evolution of the Role-Playing Genre' in the graveyard slot on the conference's final day. Dene and Simon Carter's speech on 'The Pros and Cons of Organic Design' and David Braben's 'Another Five Years From Now: Future Technology' were two speeches which made the reverse journey from a GDCE debut in 2001 to be repeated at San Jose, 2002.



GDC took place at the convention centre in San Jose, between March 19–23. Many European developers were absent, perhaps waiting for the August conference in London

Head to head

Away from the conference program, both Sony and Microsoft maintained a strong presence at the show, with Sony having a large stand on the expo floor for the first time. It demonstrated PlayStation2 running *Twisted Metal Black* online, a preproduction version of the PS2 Performance Analyzer and the soon-to-be released Linux for PS2 kit. It also entered the hearts and minds battle as the main sponsor of the infamous Booth crawl, where companies hand out free beer and freebies on the Friday night of the conference.

Xbox's successful launch was highlighted in a keynote by Pete Isensee from Microsoft's Advanced Technology Group, although he did confess the lack of global usability testing with respect to the infamous controller. He said the interface design team experienced some nervous moments too, after it realised it had forgotten that German text required 30 per cent more onscreen space because of concatenation. More positively, Microsoft claims it now has the capacity to build one Xbox every three seconds.

Elsewhere, Microsoft focused on the practicalities of developing for its console. It was at pains to push developers' horizons, both in terms of modelling complex materials such as fur and grass, and with respect to using the full range of the console's audio hardware. The DirectX team was also on hand to give some pointers on the future direction of the PC's gaming application programming interface. Both parts of the Microsoft machine hosted their now traditionally priapic parties for delegates.

The mood among middleware technology providers was more subdued than normal however. The majority of press releases talked about consolidating business models and marketing rather than new featuresets. Criterion was a rare exception as it managed to


Criterion managed to draw visitors thanks to its free massage service









Will Wright and Scott McCloud provided the most ambitious talk with 'When Maps Collide' (above left). There's always something weird at GDC; the P5 glove controller (above right)

announce both. Its new product RenderWare Studio was demoed for the first time, while its deal to sell and support MathEngine's Karma saw the physics middleware company subsumed into Criterion's booth. In a similarly inspired move, Havok announced a deal with NDL, which will see its physics engine integrated within the US-graphics company's NetImmerse engine, as well as providing it with reseller rights for the combined product.

Shown behind closed doors, Epic's Unreal Warfare engine was the most impressive technology of the show. MathEngine's Karma is now fully integrated, and is being used to drive many of the game's interactions, from vehicle rigid-body to ragdoll dynamics. The usability of the UnrealEd editing tool has also been greatly improved, with particular attention paid to creating prescripted cinematic scenes; something that will be seen with the release of the singleplayer *Unreal 2*.



Sony had a booth for the first time. One of its key feature was the Linux kit for PS2, which consists of a mouse, keyboard, installation disk and hard drive/ethernet combination

One area of technology that is experiencing significant growth is networking. A number of online server and communication technologies were shown for the first time. Most, including Rebel Arts' VAST, Zona's Terazona and Micro Forte's Bigworld Technology, concentrated on massively multiplayer online games, offering industrial strength servers. An alternative was provided by Quazal. Its distributive approach is scalable for simple online games up to the larger persistent worlds. But the surprise of the show was provided by Valve's Gabe Newell, who launched Steam, a broadband distribution service for games, which if it works will be another nail in the coffin of current retailer-publisher-developer power hierarchy (see Codeshop, p18).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the show though, was the gradual acceptance of mobile phones within US culture; something that was reflected in the conference program with day-long talks from the likes of Digital Bridges on the process of developing phone games. It's long been understood that the US is some years behind Europe in terms of mobile technology. But there are signs that with Europe still suffering the hangover of the 3G licence farce, US developers are starting to realise the potential of this emerging field.

Hand out the gongs

Grand Theft Auto III, *Ico* and *Black & White* were the big winners at the annual Game Developers Choice Awards held during GDC. DMA Design's best-seller scooped the game of the year award, as well as the excellence in game design and an innovation spotlight award. The team members present proved to be surprisingly reticent in their acceptance speeches. Fumito Ueda and his team won the visual art and level design awards and an innovation spotlight award for *Ico*, while Lionhead's Richard Evans gained the programming award for *Black & White*'s AI. The game also picked up an innovation spotlight. Elsewhere, Bohemia Interactive got the rookie studio award for *Operation Flashpoint*, and Yuji Naka picked up the lifetime achievement award.









Industry ignores disabled community

Is the videogame industry making enough effort to cater to the needs of gamers with impairments? And is the disabled community fairly represented by the medium?

First, some facts. An estimated 8.7 million people in the UK have some hearing loss, and one in ten people in the UK (approximately 5.9 million) have impaired mobility. Gaming could potentially offer these people possibilities unavailable to them in the real world – it could be a source of pride for the industry. But what are developers doing to help the disabled play games? The answer is, so far, very little.

The active promotion of Web accessibility standards, such as those developed by the Worldwide Web Consortium, reflects the importance of information technology for the disabled community. Videogames could also mean more to the disabled. **TL Taylor**, an assistant professor at North Carolina State University (see **E**109), has discovered through her research in virtual worlds that "online communities have long been a place where not only the disabled but other housebound folks found a way to connect socially. It is not uncommon to find out some of the most active community members are in fact disabled." In her recent paper, 'Living Digitally', she notes one man who suffers from serious arthritis, remarking on the joys of freedom of movement possible in the virtual environment (being able to jump, for example), that were denied him in the real world. He reported how his virtual freedom gave emotional support in difficult real environments: "I sometimes lengthen my stride and move purposefully through malls and shopping centres the way I think [my avatar] would."

Will Pearson, pre-16 technology officer for the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), says games feature highly on the priorities of the partially-sighted kids he comes into contact with. As a result, he believes strongly in "the educational implications and possibilities" of games for the blind, and maintains a reference sheet for parents and teachers, with games that are sound-based, or offer accessibility features for the partially sighted. Games developed specifically for the blind are rare, but not always basic: *Grizzly Gulch* is a cowboy FPS with a difference, as according to developers Bavisoft, "absolutely no vision is required to play this game." *Shades Of Doom*, an audio version of the popular John McCormack classic, is popular, and text adventures, as well as games like *NetHack*, the offspring of the classic Ascii game *Rogue*, can all be played using speech or Braille access technology.

But almost all this support comes from well outside the mainstream games industry. The approximately 8.7 million disabled in the UK represent a wide range of varying disability. Why shouldn't they be able to play the same games we can?

Major disappointment

Niall Rattansi, a deaf gamer, says simple touches like a lack of subtitles in cut-scenes, mission briefings, and mid-game scenes "has ruined our enjoyment, and brought major disappointment and anger" to the deaf gaming community. He insists that the simple option of showing subtitles in games would revolutionise deaf gaming, saving deaf gamers "the hopes and bitter sweet disappointments" of getting a game home to discover whether or not it is deaf friendly. He cites Konami and Square as particularly good at ensuring subtitles are present but believes the specialist press could do more. "Videogame magazines could note in their reviews whether or not games have an option to display subtitles."

> "When Half-Life was released it was heralded as the best game of all time. Now imagine playing a completely sound orientated game if you are deaf"

Deaf gamers are beginning to lobby the industry to make the kind of simple changes that allow them to enjoy games. **Lora Willets** runs www.deafgamers.com, reviewing software from a deaf person's perspective and campaigning for deaf-friendly game features: a task that she says has been "an uphill struggle". At first, says Lora, "when the various companies were approached, they assumed that we would only want to review games specifically designed for deaf people. And would promptly reply that they didn't have any games designed for deaf people. The major problem facing deaf gamers is that the games market has changed dramatically since the introduction of the mass market sound card and then later with the CD-ROM. Developers quickly took advantage of the new technology and concentrated on developing speech within games.

"The secondary problem is that there is a fantastic lack of awareness within the gaming community that the communication needs of deaf people are not being met. For example, when *Half-Life* was released it was heralded as the best game of all time. Now imagine playing a completely sound orientated game if you are deaf: only the skimpiest of text at the start and from then on you're on your own. You can't hear the speech or the footsteps or other environmental sounds. I'm sure you get the picture. There have been numerous requests to both Sierra and Valve to provide a subtitling patch for deaf people, so that they too can enjoy the game as it was meant to be enjoyed. Every game has a script: surely it wouldn't take too long to include subtitles to accommodate deaf gamers?" Willets acknowledges that difficulties can extend further than just subtitles, but holds some titles over others as evidence that simple touches can make all the difference. "For the PS2, take a look at *GTIII*. The subtitles are on by default and the cut-scenes are subtitled. There is also an onboard radar of colour-coded dots for





Broadly speaking, titles such as *The Sims* and *Rollercoaster Tycoon* are inclusive. But they could still do a better job of representing those with disabilities

industryopinion

Edge asks the industry why it's not doing enough.

"I like the idea of using speech recognition for input. I guess that would be a good one for blind gamers. It would be very easy for games to include a little character in the corner of the screen who could sign to deaf gamers. The trouble being that text (although an ugly and interruptive form of conveying information onscreen) is generally in the game anyway – so why would publishers pay extra to have the signing included?"
David Morris
Freelance developer

"Gaming for those with disabilities is in a pretty parlous state. It is an area I wanted to reflect in the 'Game On' exhibition – but as yet there is not much to say. For those who make so much from young people you would think that all companies would seek to at least have a subtitle option – but almost no thought seems so far to have been given to this area. Which is a sign that the industry has still not matured, perhaps. There are countless cases of people who play games and feel movement and excitement they cannot get due to physical disability of some kind."
Lucien King
Rockstar Games (co-curator of 'Game On' exhibition at the Barbican)

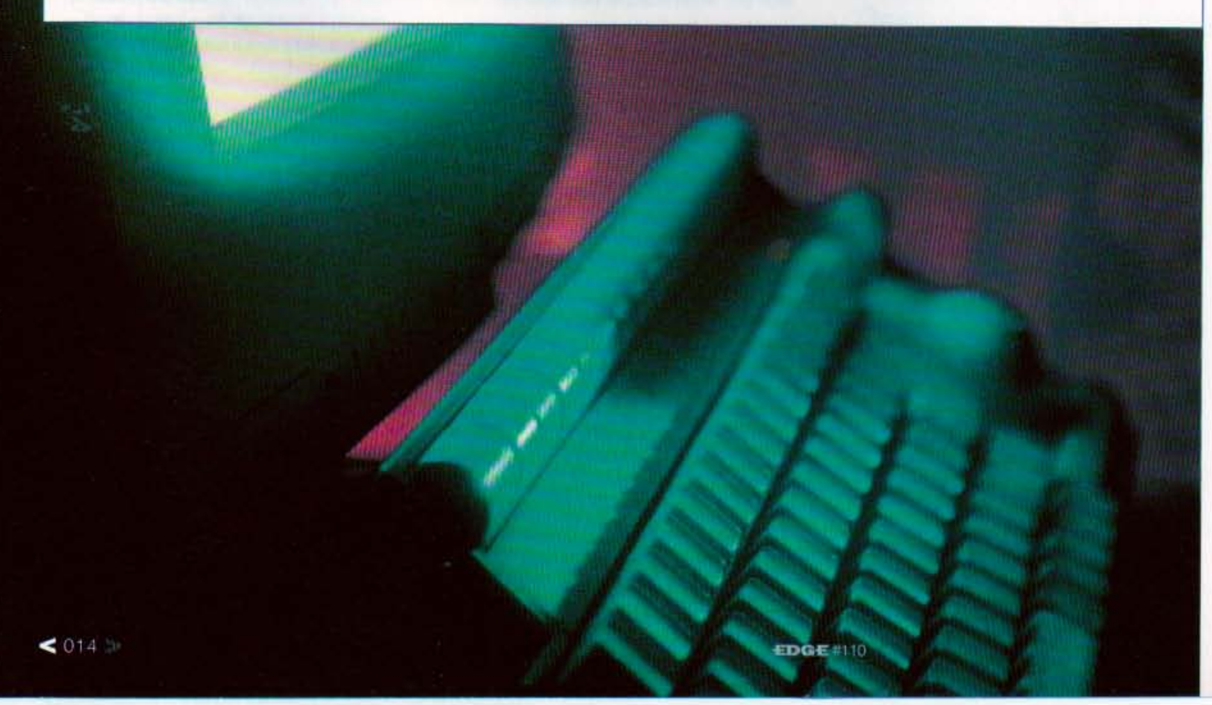
"I'm female, and I'm Indian and so don't know how I am classed as a prospective consumer by the games industry. However, I don't like the games that girls are supposed to like – how-to-dress-Barbie games, for example. I don't want to think when I get home after work. I want to stick *Tekken Tag* on, and beat the crap out of someone.

No one seems to have commissioned the research to find out what women gamers want and how these needs can be addressed. Those who market the games are able-bodied white Caucasian males, and they're working on the basis of their own preconceived ideas about the market. Similarly, if the industry doesn't conduct research into the disabled market – who is finding current games difficult, and why – then it won't begin to know how to make games more accessible."
Balbir Blugan
Kuju Entertainment

"There are eight and a half million deaf people in the UK – how about in Europe? What kind of market are developers missing out on? Subtitles have traditionally been a way of localisation that avoids high re-recording costs, and are a highly cost-effective means of catering for the deaf. The only hit is on QA budgets, testing the subtitles, but as long as the script is proofed this shouldn't be a problem. Peripherals designed for the disabled could also expand the experience of able-bodied gamers. We're taking people to fantasy worlds, it's all about giving people freedom: we should be doing that for everyone."
Ben Wibberley
BabelMedia

"I do think that we need to do more to help deaf and disabled gamers to enjoy interactive entertainment. In particular multilingual subtititles in games whose gameplay relies heavily or storyline and dialogue. I understand there are initiatives in this area at present.

As game developers we can all learn a lesson from the accessibility support built into Windows, to make the operating system easier to use for those with limited dexterity or poor eyesight. It would not take much effort to include such options in games. I believe that as the overall market expands we will be able to justify making games targeted at very specific niches, the obvious segmentation being age and sex but I think that in time we will also be seeing games for even more tightly defined niches than those."
Karl Jeffery
Climax



your hideout and mission objectives. If the police are on your tail, stars appear at the top of the screen. Compare this to *MGS2* where you must locate some bombs. Agai[n] you are given a radar but instead of pinpointing the exact location as in *GTAIII*, i[t] displays a green cloud on the radar. But in *MGS2*, the radar beeps when you are directly next to the bomb. How many deaf gamers would hear that beep?"

Basic touches

The features needed by other disabled gamers are also often basic touches. Will Pearson says that force feedback helps partially sighted gamers a great deal, and says games could also offer basic high-contrast colour choices, "rather like choosing your vehicle or weapon at the sta[rt] of a game, except now you can choose the main character and event colour schemes."

For those with motor difficulties, hardware and software exists to facilitate access to mainstream games. Mindmaker, [a] company who specialises in developing software specifically for the disabled community, has used its expertise to develop Game Commander voice control software for RTS and FPS games. **Earl Block**, operations manager at Mindmaker, says he receives "positive comments from gamers that are disabled, that Game Commander has helped them play more games." Hardware company, RJ Cooper also provides peripherals designed for the motor-impaired, and Namco is working on [a] PS2 controller to facilitate games access.

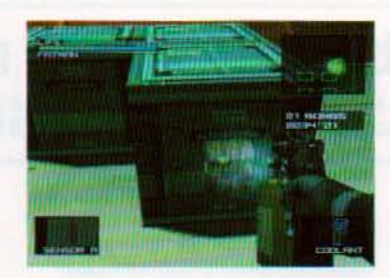
But it's not just about helping disabled gamers play games. The problem extends beyond accessibility, and into representation. **Anne Cunningham** is deaf, and her partner has a mobility impairment. When her two boys began to play games o[n] her PC, she noticed that their favourite



Force Feedback technology is another avenue that developers can use to improve the lot of disabled gamers

games made no allowances for including disabled people within the game world. In Hasbro's *Rollercoaster Tycoon*, she remembers, "there were no facilities to make any of the rides accessible to wheelchair users or other disabled people." When Anne emailed the manufacturers, she got what she felt was "a very unhelpful, dismissive response." The other game her boys bought was *Sim City*, "and again, there were no disabled or deaf Sims. I emailed them asking why, and also why there was no opportunity to put ramps, hoists, low level kitchens, text-phones, flashing doorbells, etc. Again [I received] an unhelpful response, to say they had no plans to include disabled Sims in the future. When I wrote to both the manufacturers, I said that by not including disabled or deaf people in the games they were presenting a very unrealistic worldview. I was especially fascinated by *Rollercoaster* – because that would have given children a great opportunity to design something and think about how to make things accessible."





***Grand Theft Auto III* uses a variety of cues that are helpful to gamers with hearing impairments. *Metal Gear Solid 2*, by contrast, relies on audio cues that aren't so helpful**

Since October 1999, when part 3 came into effect, service providers have had to consider making reasonable adjustments to the way they deliver their services so that disabled people can use them. As Vincent points out, "Examples of services to which the law applies include access to or use of means of communication, information facilities and use of entertainment. Further, there is an obligation to make it easier for disabled people to use your product or service. Under section 21, it is the duty of providers of the service to make reasonable adjustments."

"In Metal Gear Solid 2, the radar beeps when you are directly next to the bomb. How many deaf gamers would hear that beep?"

This neglect of the disabled by games developers may soon change. Both the European Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA) and The Independent Games Developers Association (TIGA) have said they are ready to commit to putting their weight behind the lobbying of deaf gamers. According to **Kevin Carey**, director at HumanITy (a registered charity founded to investigate and tackle social exclusion problems raised by information technology) equal opportunities access to digital technology is finally being recognised as a major issue. "The UK's Cabinet Office has been looking into standards for digital television. There will be a section in the next draft on disability access, largely generated as the result of the Web accessibility guidelines for government Websites adopted by the government in December 1999." It might not be long before games come under the eyes of the government.

In fact, the relevant law is already in force. The Disability and Discrimination Act 1995, the same legislation that ensures buildings accommodate disabled access, also applies to 'services'. According to **Vincent Scheurer** at Osborne Clarke, an international law firm specialising in the technology sector, 'Services' also means goods or facilities – and this applies to games.

Lora Willets believes developers are breaking this law, by not making their games accessible to the communication needs of deaf people. But the law makes allowances for what is reasonable; and, as Vincent Scheurer interprets, "What is reasonable will depend on the ease with which it can be achieved." Parliament has the power to prescribe maximum reasonable expenditure limits on the part of the service providers, but they have not yet done this for games developers.

Scheurer acknowledges that the Act can be vague, and commercial concerns are often a better means to bring about more rapid change. "If it's a statutory duty, people can't always take direct legal action. The law in itself is not a great mechanism for changing things quickly. Market pressures are a much better way to do this." The fact remains, though, as Scheurer points out in the case of deaf gamers, "From a technological standpoint, there is no obvious reason why it should be hard for the code to play a sound to display a text indication as well."

The commercial argument is that the expenditure for displaying things such as subtitles, and paying attention to the use of colour, is minimal, and the market gains – worldwide – stand to be significant. As the recent boom in text messaging among deaf people shows, the deaf and disabled are a large market – and, for developers, an untapped source of revenue, with an estimated £40 billion per annum to spend in the UK. Statistics show that 25 per cent of the population are, or knows someone who is, disabled, and so account for a large percentage of the shopping public.

Iain Simmons, a lawyer at Harbottle & Lewis who specialises in computer games law, believes that the Disability and Discrimination act absolutely does apply to computer games. "If a publisher phoned me up and said, 'I've had some contact with the RNIB, and they are claiming my game is unclear: do they have any power by law?' I'd advise my clients: Yes, they do." Simmons also acknowledges that the pressures go beyond the legal rights. "There's also a moral, and a business case."

Vincent Scheurer points out the recent trend towards using videogames in schools, as acknowledged by changes in the national curriculum, and that the DTI is keen to promote games in the classroom. "Educational authorities have an obligation to increase the extent to which the disabled are able to take part in the curriculum," says Scheurer. This process can only be facilitated by a higher-developed standard of accessibility in games. Scheurer suggests closer liaison between disability rights groups and games developers, with accreditation on-box to help consumers. Will Pearson agrees, "For [games companies] to consult with some of the disabled players would be the first step in appreciating the qualities an accessible game would need."

The purpose of society, ultimately, is to provide for the vulnerable. It could be a sign of the maturity of the games development community, that these issues are beginning to be taken seriously. Or, more cynically, perhaps at least the commercial pressures will begin to expand the awareness of a need to make all our spaces, virtual or otherwise, accessible to all.

CUTTINGS



PSM2 gets superior coverdisc

Future publishing's 'PSM2' magazine is to launch a technologically superior, rebranded, covermounted DVD with its May edition. It features the latest reviews and previews as well as a fully animated 3D interface designed by Subliminal, whose CV includes ad campaigns for titles such as *Wipeout Fusion* and *Ico*, and record sleeves for the likes of James. DVD9 technology will sustain up to three hours of video playback, and Dolby Digital 5.1 playback will also be supported where appropriate. Highlights include the first glimpse of virtual Britney, an interview with *Stuntman* head honcho Martin Edmondson, and a Making of *Tomb Raider* Video. The magazine goes on sale from April 27.

IGDA provides for new entrants

In a bid to demystify the process of obtaining a career in the videogame industry, the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) has set up a Website aimed at providing would be developers with the appropriate resources. The site contains a breakdown of the careers available in the videogame industry, profiles of people working in the industry, and a series of links to Web resources. For more information check out the Website at: http://www.igda.org/breakingin/home.htm

Independent developers given a head start

Start Games has announced a partnership with Criterion Software that will enable independent developers to avail of the RenderWare platform during the early stages of development without up front costs. The company, which was recently formed by talent management agency ICM communications, Telewest, and business concept developer Extreme Finance, provides funding and resources for independent developers to put together working prototypes – aiming to give them the freedom from financial pressures to produce original software. It recently announced the appointment of Bullfrog founder and industry veteran, Les Edgar to its board as a non-executive director.

Sega gives public display of new software line-up

Game JAM expo demonstrates the latest multiplatform fruits of Edge's Publisher of the Year, but Xbox announcements will have to wait until E3

With no official word regarding Sega's forthcoming Xbox titles, Nintendo was the major beneficiary of the company's multiplatform announcements at its recent Game JAM exhibition. The event, now in its second year, took place from March 30–31, at the stylish Tokyo International Forum expo centre. In the absence of the Spring Tokyo Game Show, and in light of Sega's multiplatform strategy initiated at the last autumn Tokyo Game Show, interest from members of the public was high. Company officials were hard pressed to deal with the 24,000 visitors that turned up over the two days of the event, having to allow them into the venue in batches.

The event provided optimistic signs that Sega is acquiring a new audience for its software, with a notable presence from young children. Although *Sonic Advance* got off to a disappointing start in Japan, the weeks following its launch have seen a steady build up of sales among younger gamers, which is good news for Sega. Sonic Team had other reasons to be cheerful; the two-hour long queues of gamers eager to get their hands on the GameCube version of *PSO* (now called *Phantasy Star Online (Episodes I & II)* and featuring a new island area) made it difficult to move inside the exhibition centre. The game was demonstrated alongside the dozens of awards won by the Dreamcast original, and with the final version of the GameCube keyboard peripheral.

Network ready

Surprisingly, Yuji Naka revealed that the game will be network compatible in Japan, with beta testing commencing at the end of May. Indeed it's already possible to order a trial version of the game and a 56k modem adaptor for ¥9,800 (£50), or with an additional keyboard for ¥16,600 (£90). A further monthly charge of ¥600 (£3.20) or three-monthly charge of ¥1,500 (£7.90) will also be required. But given Nintendo's reluctance to commit to the online sector it's possible that the European version of *PSO* will be released as a standalone title.



The Tokyo International Forum expo provided a suitably stylish location for Sega's Game JAM exhibition

The Game JAM expo provided optimistic signs that Sega is acquiring a new audience for its software, with a notable presence from young children



Sega's Dreamcast console might be gone, but it's by no means forgotten

Naka-san also revealed his intention to develop a card battle title based on the *PSO* universe, perhaps to be supported by Card-e technology.

Elsewhere, Yu Suzuki unveiled news of a title called *Virtua Fighter Quest* on GameCube. Like the original concept for *Shenmue*, *Virtua Fighter RPG*, it will blend simplified beat 'em up mechanics with RPG elements and feature all of the characters from the *Virtua Fighter* series. Other titles on display included Sega-AM2's *Beach Spikers*, a GameCube version of *Skies of Arcadia* and *Aerodancing 4*, But the other major news was that Sega has increased its holding in *Sakura Taisen* developer, Red Entertainment, to a controlling stake of 70 per cent. The first title to be released under the new arrangement will be *GunGrave* (see p43), an intense cel-shaded action title for PlayStation2, but two other titles are also currently under development: *Planet Gun Smoke Trigun*, and another, as yet unnamed title that's rumoured to be an action-oriented *Sakura Taisen* title.

Although there were no official Xbox announcements, *Panzer Dragoon* is still expected at E3, and Sega-AM2 confirmed that *OutRun 2* and *Virtua Cop 2* will both be developed for Xbox arcade hardware. The highlight of the show though, was undoubtedly Hitmaker's Crazy Live concert, complete with 'Sega hymn.'



Sonic Team was justifiably proud of its awards over the past year. There will be more *PSO* titles on the cards in the future





Phantasy Star Online (Episodes I & II) on the GameCube was probably the most popular exhibit at the show, with punters waiting up to two hours to get a chance to check it out

onedotzero enters sixth year

Festival of the moving image features big screen celebration of videogame CGI alongside other visual disciplines

The festival of the digital moving image, onedotzero, is set to return for its sixth year at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) from May 17–26. Exploring new forms of moving image, the event has been running since 1997, and has showcased the work of distinguished figures such as Spike Jonze and Mike Mills. The event is sponsored by PlayStation2 and is made up of several different strands which bring together various disciplines, including film making, music video, club visuals, and for the second year, videogame CGI.

The show's major sections include 'Features', which consists of short films and documentaries; 'Wow & Flutter', which presents a programme drawn from the field of animation innovation; 'Wavelength', featuring the work of critically acclaimed directors from the field of music videos and commercials; and 'Extended Play', showing longer films. These segments are supplemented by a series of panels and presentations made up of industry figures, called 'Innervisions', which aim to demystify the creative process. And there are also live events throughout the course of the show such as live audio-visual mixing.

Of most interest to **Edge** though, is the 'J-star' round-up of Japanese moving imagery, and 'Lens Flare', a compilation of groundbreaking videogame graphics shown on a big screen. This year, the showreel will include titles such as *Cel Damage*, *Onimusha 2*, *Jet Set Radio Future*, *Throne of Darkness*, *Jo Jo's Bizarre Adventures*, *Ico* and *Z2: Steel Soldiers*.

"The onedotzero digital arts festival was one of the first to recognise computer games as something more than just a pixellated playground," explains **Emily Newton Dunn**, of the Young Casual Element consultancy, who has been involved in the composition of the show reel. "Six years later and it appears the rest of the world is finally catching up. Game graphics are being used in advertising, music videos and even featuring in their own films. onedotzero saw the potential from the start – It's an awesome experience to see game graphics on a cinema screen and one that opens up the medium beyond gamers. It's about time that the industry got the recognition it deserves." For more information, see www.onedotzero.com.





The ICA's onedotzero festival will include a whole section devoted to videogames. Titles such as *Ico* and *Jet Set Radio Future* (above) are part of 'Lens Flare'

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Broken Sword: The Shadow of the Templars	GBA	Bam! Entertainment	Revolution Software	7
Dead or Alive 3 (PAL)	Xbox	Microsoft	Tecmo	7
Star Trek: Bridge Commander	PC	Activision	Totally Games	7
Genma Onimusha	Xbox	Capcom	In-house	6
Laser Squad Nemesis	PC	Codo Games	In-house	6
RalliSport Challenge	Xbox	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	6
Global Ops	PC	Electronic Arts	Crave Entertainment	5
Virtua Striker 3	GC	Sega	Amusement Vision	5
Blood Wake	Xbox	Microsoft	Stormfront Studios	4
State of Emergency	PS2	Rockstar Games	Vis Interactive	4
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions	Xbox	Activision	Bunkasha	4
Nightcaster: Defeat the Darkness	Xbox	Microsoft	VR1 Entertainment	3
TransWorld Surf	Xbox	Atari	Angel Studios	3



Six years old, but *Broken Sword* on the GBA is refreshingly good



Is *Dead or Alive 3* the greatest beat 'em up to date? Perhaps



Bridge Commander swells the ranks of decent 'Star Trek' titles



RalliSport Challenge, a rather good rally option for Xbox fans

CUTTINGS



Sony looks to distributed future

Sony Computer Entertainment has signed an agreement with Toshiba to develop high performance chips based on IBM's silicon-on-insulator technology. At GDC, the company revealed that PlayStation3 is likely to benefit from distributed computing, and is also working with IBM itself to benefit from the company's research experience with Big Blue.

Elsewhere, Sony's recently unveiled plans to commence its broadband services in Japan have been delayed because the company is still in talks with several broadband access providers, with the details of the service yet to be finalised.

2C or not 2C

Reported in last issue, the date of 2C: The Official PlayStation Event, which will take place in West London's Gunnersbury Park, has moved. The event, which is sponsored by SCEE and 'The Sun', will now take place from August 30–September 1. A host of videogame developers and publishers have signed up for the event, including Acclaim, Virgin Interactive, Midway, Ubi Soft, Rage and Codemasters. Other attractions include freebie give-aways, urban sports arenas, big name music acts and a massive outdoor cinema that will be showing the 'Resident Evil' movie. Tickets for the event cost £18 per day, and are available by calling 0115 934 8757, or visiting the event Website at http://www.2ctheofficialplatstationevent.com/

Internet Advance

Startup peripheral manufacturer X-traFun is developing a Game Boy Advance cartridge that will transform Nintendo's handheld into a Web access device. The cartridge uses wireless Bluetooth technology and an embedded microprocessor, but CEO and ex-NASA engineer Mark Kramer claims that it will be just as simple to use as a conventional GBA cartridge, and will sell for a similar price. It will allow up to seven users to play together in a local wireless peer-to-peer network and offer email access. The company intends to sell the product online when it is released in the autumn. See http://www.x-trafun.com/home.htm for more information.

Powering the broadband future

www.steampowered.com

Already famed for Half-Life, Valve Software is now looking to revolutionise the games industry's use of broadband with its Steam technology



An in-game instant messaging service is another important community feature accessible using Steam

The digital distribution of games has the potential to shift power from retailers to developers – that's been long understood. The only problem is that no one has successfully implemented it on a large scale. Until now that is. Valve's managing director **Gabe Newell** stunned the audience for his business and legal keynote presentation at GDC with the announcement of Steam: Valve's broadband game distribution system.

Building on Valve's research, which discovered that the majority of US hardcore gamers had an Internet connection faster than 512 kbps, Steam has been developed as a broadband business platform for the direct delivery of software and content management. Designed as a distributive file system, users download a basic client onto their PC and fill in a standard set of registration queries as well as clearing credit card authorisation – Steam is designed to work on either a monthly subscription or a pay-per-game-download basis.

A key point of the system however, is that complete games are not downloaded onto a player's hard drive. Instead, to be deployed onto Steam, a game is broken down into chunks, which are effectively streamed through the broadband connection onto a player's PC. So while a player can buy the rights to a game via Steam, they won't physically own the game in terms of possessing a CD or DVD. This is particularly important for the huge PC gaming market in Korea and Taiwan, as gamers can log in to their Steam accounts and quickly access their portfolio of games while playing in gaming cafés, for example.



Using Steam, gamers will be able to access any game they buy or subscribe to via the service from any broadband-connected PC just by logging into their account

According to Newell, this is crucial for Valve. He claims that the developer's properties, particularly *Counter-Strike*, are generating over three billion player minutes per month, which makes them larger IPs than the TV series 'Friends'. Unfortunately Valve hasn't been able to generate any revenue from this huge audience. "Even worse is the fact that it costs us money in terms of servers and bandwidth to release updates."

Byte size

In contrast, the cost of downloading a byte is now less than the cost of replicating a byte via CD; hence the move to digital distribution. By using Steam, not only will Valve drive down support costs, but it will also be able to sell software direct to gamers. For an average application of 600Mb, retailing at $40, after taking out marketing, support, billing, bandwidth and server costs, Newell calculated Valve would be generating a margin of over $30 per sale, compared to the sub-$10 cut it currently makes per game sale via brick-and-mortar retailers.

Steam is presently undergoing beta testing with over 75,000 gamers in the US. It will go live with the release of *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, which will be simultaneously available at retail and via Steam. "I'm having some sleepless nights worrying about what will happen," Newell reveals. "Sometimes I think no one will download the game, other times I can't think how it could fail."

One interesting by-product of Steam's thin-client architecture is that it reduces the need for patches, as users will always receive the most up-to-date version of a game. Equally, graphics companies are keen to use it to ensure users always have the correct drivers for their cards. David Kirk, nVidia's chief scientist, and Dave Rolston, ATI's vice president of engineering, both pledged their companies' support for Steam. This will involve allowing access to higher resolution textures and models to gamers whose graphics cards support them.

Valve is also licensing Steam for other developers via an SDK. Alex Garden, CEO of Relic, demonstrated *Impossible Creatures* running on Steam, though he says Relic and publisher Microsoft didn't have plans to release the game using Steam at the present time. The SDK contains an integrated set of communication tools and Valve's Graphic User Interface (V-GUI) which includes instant messaging and game servers browsing functions.

Building the backend

While Steam is clearly an impressive piece of technology, perhaps Valve's ambitions are most clearly demonstrated by the variety of companies supporting it. Gabe Newell recommended that developers considering using the system should outsource their backend server requirements to specialists, rather than attempt to maintain industrial strength 24/7 servers themselves. "We have enough trouble keeping the Valve email servers up and running," he joked.

To that extent, representatives from networking companies such as AT&T, Gamespy, Speakeasy and Acer were on hand during Newell's presentation to voice their support for Steam. Other partners of the program include the likes of Korea.com, Nexon, Telstra, Yummy and Telus.





Valve's broadband game distribution system, Steam, will face its first major test with the release of *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* later on in the year

www.sensaura.com

Hearing the same tune

Sensaura's audio solution GameCODA aims to raise the standard of game audio across all platforms

UK-audio specialist Sensaura has been on a roll ever since Microsoft implemented its 3D positional audio (3DPA) technology within Xbox's MCP chip. 3DPA also ships in around 65 per cent of PC audio chips, but according to senior engineer **Adam Philps**, that just wasn't enough. "Both PlayStation2 and GameCube are capable of running 3DPA, so it makes sense for us to offer the technology to developers for those platforms as well," he says. "Making sure audio sounds the same is a big deal for developers, particularly now so many are creating games for all platforms." The result is GameCODA, a modular crossplatform middleware audio solution.

Positional sound

With this aim in mind, one crucial focus has been to ensure GameCODA is easy to use. Audio is notorious for tying up a developer's programming resources.

Listen to this

Sound is always a difficult medium to demo, particularly on a noisy show floor. With that in mind, a room in the San Jose Hilton was the setting for Sensaura's GDC GameCODA demos. One showed the technology working in conjunction with terrain generated by Intrinsic's Alchemy graphics engine, as well as collisions triggered by Havok's physics. More retro (and fun) was the port of GameCODA to *Doomsday*. This freeware version of *Doom* originally used DirectSound and Creative's EAX reverb implementation to create dynamic audio depending on the geometry and wall coverings of the environment.

"We designed it to be a data-driven, rather than a code-driven product," explains Philps. The key is a 3ds max plug-in, allowing non-programmers to place and define sounds within a 3ds max environment. "All you do is tag graphical objects with positional sound," Philps says. Sound parameters such as pitch, falloff over distance, sound cones as well as specific 3DPA effects such as Zoom and MacroFX can be set using dropdown menus. "You can even put a box around a whole room and set up an environment effect such as reverb or occlusion," Philps continues. An audio resource file is then exported from 3ds max and used by the realtime game engine, which pulls in all the audio files and deals with processing the line-of-sight calculations used to define the occlusion.

"In a sense, GameCODA is a bit like Creative's EAGLE tools," ends Philps. "The problem with that was, it was a separate product, so you were always switching from max to EAGLE. With GameCODA everything's integrated together. That, and the fact developers can always guarantee what their audio will sound like, makes all the difference."



This GameCODA environmental demo used the Alchemy renderer to show 3D sounds, as well as occlusion effects

www.audiogang.org

Musicians GANG up

The newly launched Game Audio Network Guild plans to bring the game sound community together

Audio has always been something of a red-headed stepchild in the world of videogames. It's a situation that the Game Audio Network Guild (GANG) has been founded to change. Launched at GDC, the non-profit organisation plans to act as a focal point for all things audio in the game industry.

Gang show

Founder and president **Tommy Tallarico** says, "GANG is an organisation that will educate the gaming industry about the importance of audio in interactive entertainment, and how to create a superior sound experience." Other people involved in GANG at directorial level include Dennis Staats, Dolby's director of computer and games technology marketing, Jon Kirchner, president and CEO of DTS and Brian Schmidt, Xbox's audio program manager.

The organisation hopes to act as a community resource for musicians, sound designers and composers, as well as providing technical information and increasing the public's awareness of game audio. Of particular interest to aspiring audiophiles is GANG's proposed certificate of approval for members, which it hopes will help them find employment.

Sound career

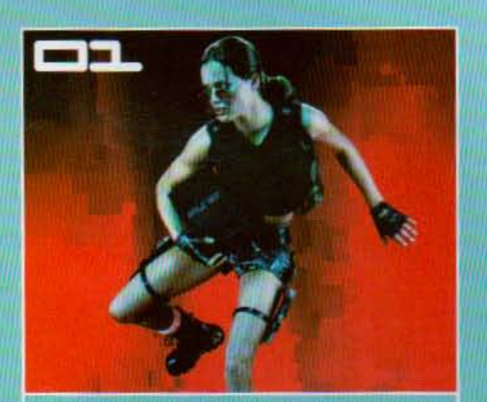
It also plans to set up a series of apprenticeship and internships, while legal resources, such as sample contracts, will be deployed on the GANG Website to help freelancers negotiate contracts. And as is usual in such circumstances, the highlight of the year will be the annual award ceremony.

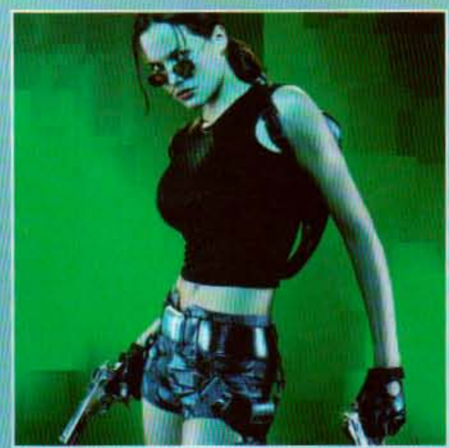
Membership for professionals is set at $100 (£70) per year, or $50 (£35) for students.



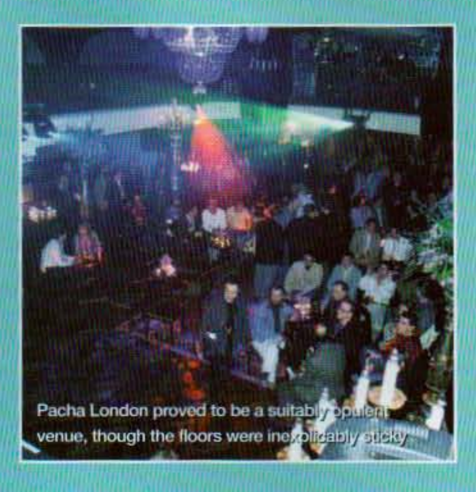
More than just a Website, the recently launched Game Audio Network Guild hopes to advance the cause of great game audio, as well as bringing sound designers and composers together

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE

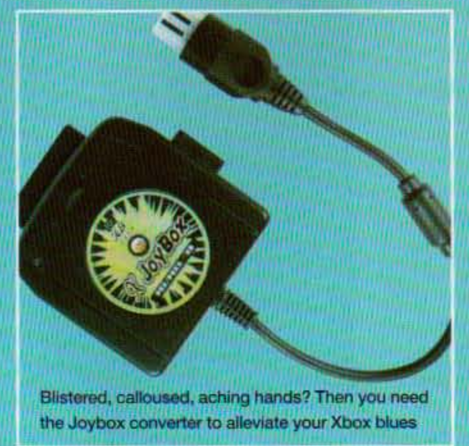

The new face of Lara Croft. But will she rise to the dizzy heights that other Laras have scaled






Pacha London proved to be a suitably opulent venue, though the floors were inexplicably sticky




Blistered, calloused, aching hands? Then you need the Joybox converter to alleviate your Xbox blues

01 A Lorra Lara

UK: Pacha London provided the suitably lavish (though sticky-floored) venue for Eidos Interactive's recent unveiling of the latest chapter in the *Tomb Raider* series, *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* (see p36). After being wowed by compere Chris Barrie, the assembled crowd of European journalists listened intently to industry luminaries such as SCEE's Chris Deering and Core Design's Jeremy Heath-Smith, and scrutinised preview footage in hushed tones, before erupting in excitement when the new face of Lara was finally unveiled.

20-year-old Dutch model, Jill de Jong, provided the face in question, though it's fair to point out that most members of the assembled crowd were probably more interested in her vital statistics (38-26-34, fact fans). Her impressive CV boasts a globetrotting career and a high point modelling L'Oreal hair products, and apparently, "Like Lara Croft, Jill loves adventure and sport and enjoys beating men at their own game."

02 Joybox of delights

Hong Kong: A gamer's favourite joypad is almost as important as their preferred hardware format. It's a matter of some significance that has, no doubt, initiated a few playground scrapes over the years. But delicate-handed Xbox owners still coming to terms with Microsoft's triple-cheeseburger sized joypad can rejoice. Thirdparty manufacturer, Joybox, has created a special appliance that neatly lets you use a PS2 DualShock pad on Xbox games. It works remarkably efficiently and at $14.90 (£10.45) it makes life on the Xbox version of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* a whole lot easier. The Joybox converter can be ordered at www.liksang.com.

Soundbytes

"Microsoft has had its teeth kicked in, in both Europe and Japan."
John Riccitiello, president of Electronic Arts puts the boot in

"Created by Tetsuya Mizuguchi, *Rez* is a videogame which seeks to create a sense of synaesthesia, in which colours are heard and sounds are seen, and is inspired in part by the work of which Russian artist and colour theorist, born in 1866, whose paintings frequently attempted to portray visually the impact of musical notes?"
Jeremy Paxman poses the question on 'University Challenge Reunited.' It was answered successfully by a member of the Merton College team of 1981

"Once, taking a short cut from Piccadilly Circus to Shaftesbury Avenue, I stopped off in the Trocadero and played a videogame for an hour. It was a skiing game where you wear fake skis and I got rather addicted. There was a particular score I had to get past and once I started, I couldn't stop. And, rather embarrassingly, people *did* recognise me."
Stephen Fry in the 'Evening Standard's 'ES' magazine reveals something he's never told anyone before

03 Cube Club Competition

UK: As reported last issue, Nintendo is organising a series of Cube Club events to promote the GameCube in advance of the console's launch on May 3. Each venue on the tour will feature 50 demo pods to provide a taste of the 20 titles scheduled for launch as well as showcasing post-launch titles such as *Super Smash Bros. Melee* and *Pikmin*. Additional attractions include the WaveRace rider and Photo-Cube.

Edge has 25 tickets to give away for the last two nights of the tour, which will take place on Friday April 26 and Saturday April 27, at The Boilerhouse, Old Truman Brewery, Brick Lane, London, E1, from 6–11pm. Entrants should submit their names and addresses, via email, to edge@futurenet.co.uk by 5pm on Thursday April 25. Winners will be drawn at random and notified via email. Future Publishing's standard competition rules apply, and entry to the Cube Club events is restricted to over 18's only. See www.cubeclub.co.uk for more information about the tour.

04 NiGHT NiGHT

UK: Forum user **neeKlamy**, winner of the **Edge** Forum's 'Send **Edge** Something Good' competition with his self-designed Miyamoto money (see **E**104), has a new soft toy, and *NiGHTS* fans will recognise it immediately. "I've tried to find some for sale, with no luck, so, why not make one instead?" says neeKlamy. "Never having made anything out of material before, and never having done any stitching made it a challenge as well." A Naka-san fanboy's ultimate sleeping accessory, the plush model even has luminescent eyes for tiny noctiphobic Nightopians. Christmas NiGHTS will come later in the year, with the possibility of Realas to follow. More information: klamy@lineone.net

05 Chrome competition

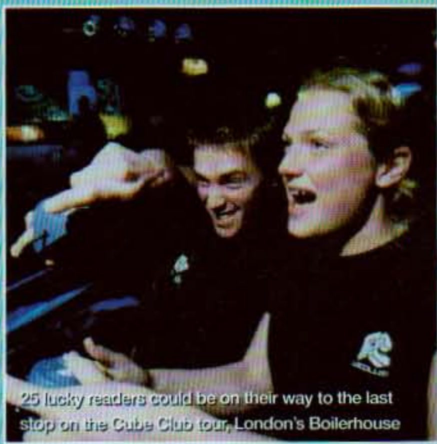
UK: As a result of an office move this month, **Edge** has uncovered a selection of print proofs of past covers quietly hiding behind one of the filing cabinets. While some are almost identical to the covers you get to see (perhaps sporting an alternative colour scheme), others are substantially different treatments to those that eventually made it on to the shelves. Not the most fascinating discovery, granted, but **Edge** has decided to give them away as limited collectors' editions. If nothing else they might add some value to your collection next time it's up on eBay. Entrants should send their favourite videogame-related jokes to **Edge**'s postal address, or via email to edge@futurenet.co.uk. Future Publishing's standard competition rules apply.

Data Stream

Titus Interactive's newly increased stake in Interplay: **72.4%**
Interplay's net revenues for 2001 fourth quarter: **$21.5m (£15m)**
Interplay's net revenues for 2000 fourth quarter: **$30.8m (£21.5m)**
Eidos Interactive's original forecast revenue: **£135m**
Eidos Interactive's revised forecast revenue: **£120m**
Take 2's Q1 2002 net profit: **$34.8m (£24.3m)**
World record *Asteroids* score, performed at the All-American Billiard Company on November 13, 1982: **41,336,440**
Number of registered users of Discreet's gmax consumer game design and content editing software: **125,000**
Number of copies of *The Sims* sold worldwide: **6.3m**


As Edge goes to press, the Cube Club tour has already graced Newcastle with its presents

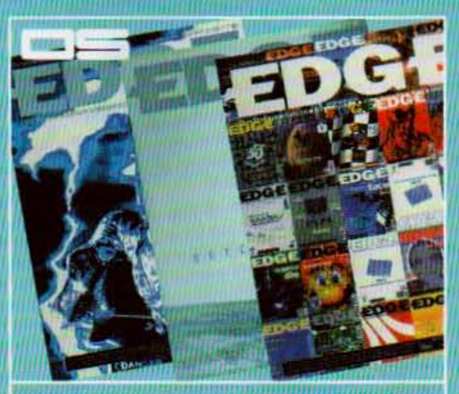
CUBECLUB


25 lucky readers could be on their way to the last stop on the Cube Club tour, London's Boilerhouse

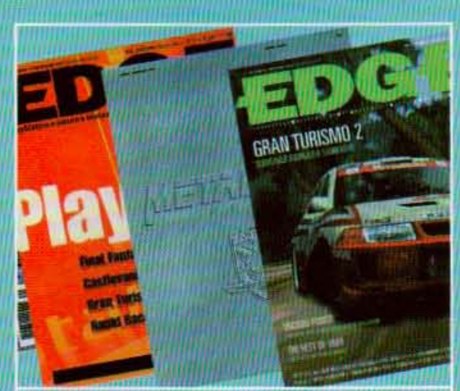





Say hello to Edge's new bedtime buddy. A prize to the first person to send in a model of Hannah S Club



Adding indisputable value to your Edge collection, preproduction proofs of some seminal Edge covers



Now you too can see the number of mistakes and typos that Edge's production editor has to eliminate


It's unlikely that the Game Boy Advance version of *Crazy Taxi* will look quite so polygonally splendid


But the mechanics of titles like *Super Monkey Ball* should translate to Nintendo's handheld intact


Converting the *Phantasy Star* titles should be a slightly more straightforward affair though






Lego *Strider 1&2* characters – *Street Fighter* and *Biohazard* equivalents coming next. Then again…


A "*Pac-Man*-style" game, the best ROM available for the Game Downloader. Well, it's a start, at least…


… but it's not the sort of thing most buyers would have wanted from the deceivingly-named PC device

06 Monkey Ball's in your hand

Japan: There's good news for anyone foolish or unfortunate enough to miss out on the past achievements of **Edge**'s Publisher of the Year. Sega has announced an agreement with US publisher THQ to produce Game Boy Advance versions of 16 titles drawn from its illustrious back catalogue. Among the titles scheduled for release are conversions of *Virtua Tennis*, *Crazy Taxi* and *Super Monkey Ball*, though **Edge** is most excited about *Phantasy Star Collection*, which brings together the original three titles in this seminal series in a single package. The games will be released at the end of 2002 and early in 2003.

07 Legol action likely?

Japan: Capcom's transformation of the protagonists from its lovely Strider Hiryu 1&2 PSone 2000 release (see **E**84) into Lego characters look very cute, though Lego (which is unlikely to have been consulted) might disagree. Before you contact your favourite local importer, however, bear in mind these don't actually exist. This was promotional material distributed freely in one of Akihabara's stores which **Edge** uncovered under a pile of press releases in the recent office move. It isn't the first time videogames and Lego have mixed clandestinely – while visiting a Tokyo publisher some years ago, an **Edge** member was kindly presented with a t-shirt depicting the core members of one of the company's development teams in Lego guise. For fear of getting the team in trouble with the ferociously protective Danish plastic shape maker, the garment in question remains unworn.

08 Downloadin' Freeloadin'

UK: A game downloader for the Game Boy? Why, it's every freeloading pirate's dream come true. But hold fast, Jolly Roger, because Blaze's Game Downloader isn't everything you might be hoping for. Consisting of a lumpy grey plastic cartridge, a wire to connect it to your PC, and a CD containing the appropriate software, the kit allows you to download tiny homemade games from mp3games.net and tire of them at your leisure. Rip-offs of *Pac-Man* and *Breakout* abound, although the more adventurous amongst you might want to try *Lawn Boy*, possibly a last-generation update of Duncan McDonald's classic *Advanced Lawnmower Simulator*.

Continue

Chris Barrie
For earning his money at the *Tomb Raider* launch
Barbican's Game On exhibition
And the accompanying coffee table-suited guidebook
European *Frequency* release
She's got DNA strands in her hair

Quit

Jonathan Ross
For not earning his money at the Xbox launch
Shoot to Kill: Colombian Crackdown
Surely just a bad taste April Fool
Andy Bodle's decision to quit games
Mainstream videogame coverage at its hilarious best



09 The Longest Way Home

During a 50-year career as a prolific and innovative sci-fi writer, Robert Silverberg's eye has always been focused more on alien lifestyles than the lure of exotic technologies. It's a trend that continues with 'The Longest Way Home', less a novel and more a description of an alternative socio-economic system.

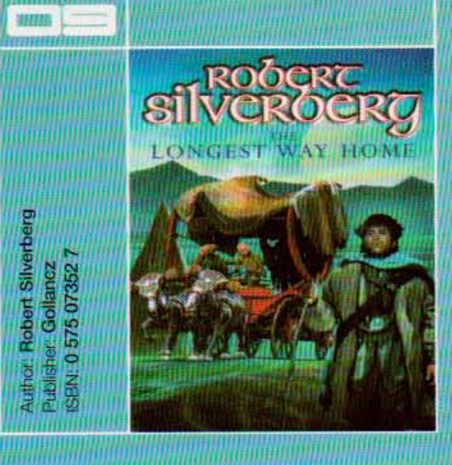
Master Joseph Keilloran, part of the ruling class of Homeworld, finds himself stranded 10,000 miles from home in hostile territory, when the social system of the planet breaks down, following a bloody rebellion by the worker classes. His progress back to his father's domain and the certainties of the world he understands provides the skeleton of Silverberg's account. Despite that, this is a story with few dramatic twists. It unfolds simply; almost to the point of abstraction. The meat on the bones is the tourists' guide to the world – creatures and habitat – that Silverberg has created, and through which Joseph journeys. His process is slow and unsteady. From time spent discovering the spirituality of the placid Indigenes to a meeting at the sharp end with the rebellious Folk, the world of Homeworld is uncovered. But this is not a gripping yarn by any means. That he will make it home is never in doubt, only what he will find on his arrival. But Silverberg has always excelled at endings, and it's certainly the most interesting part of 'The Longest Way Home'. Unfortunately, that's not quite enough to make the whole trip worthwhile.

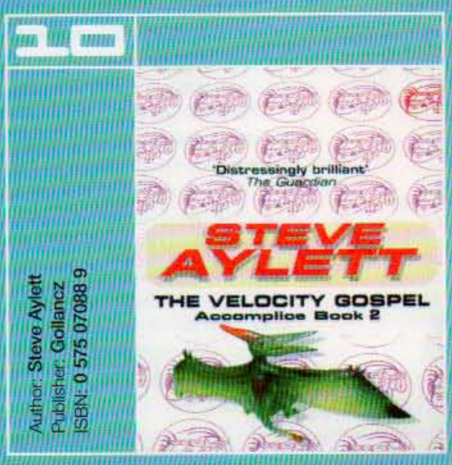
10 The Velocity Gospel

Something's not quite right when an author publishes his eighth book in seven years, while simultaneously highlighting the release date for his next two. But something isn't quite right with Steve Aylett. 'The Velocity Gospel', the second in his 'Accomplice' series, might be a novel. It's got a cover and contains words. But if so it seems to be a novel akin to Les Dawson's piano playing – all the right notes, only in the wrong order. For, not content to cut a swathe fullspeed through contemporary UK writing, Aylett also seems to be trying to breathe new life into the free word association style of writing. It died with Burroughs, and he's resurrecting it in the style of Lewis Carroll's 'The Hunting of the Snark'.

Accomplice, the location for the experience, is the twisted city setting – a semi-tropical republic on top of a world of conspiring demons. It's the background for the neverending series of encounters between Sweeney, Emperor of Cold Hell and his nemesis, Barny Juno, helped by his erstwhile companions Plantin Edge and One Round. Other characters, charmed with names such as Beltane Carom, Magenta Blaze and Chloe Low flit through, as do the evil deeds of any number of lower and higher demons. The subplot, while it matters, concerns Mayor Rudloe's fear over the Cyril conspiracy.

Aylett claims his goal is satire, and there's certainly purpose in his writing. The question is how open to interpretation that purpose is becoming. If he's not careful, before too long, he'll be writing for an audience of one.







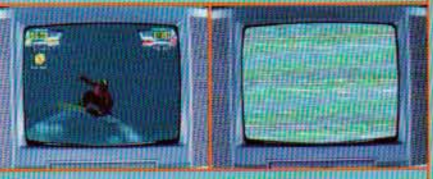
Site: **B3TA**
URL: **http://www.b3ta.com**

11 Website of the month

An excellent place for wannabe-idlers to find procrastination material, b3ta's focus is the message board where office skivers across the country exhibit their comedic Photoshop trickery. But there's an excellent weblog as well, and links to Flash games. It also hosted the 'ask the Internet' engine which, provided with two objects, would confidently declare one better than the other. Unfortunately, the results were calculated via a search on Google, who politely requested the game's cessation when they noticed millions of b3ta-sourced hits. As **Edge** goes to press, b3ta are seeking questions for an interview with Jeff Minter, and there's a *Ghosts n' Goblins*/Royal Family game that could see anyone who plays it sent to the Tower. Viewer discretion advised.

12 Advertainment

Japan: *Amped* (renamed *Tenku*) 1080s its way onto Japanese television, a country where the game should do well given the nation's love affair with all things snowboard-related. And the ad's not bad, either.



Voiceover: "Here is *Tenku*'s champ!" Static fills the screen and it's on to a real mountain range.



"I'm going to be a *Tenku* champ, too," says a worryingly eager player.



And without hesitation, our very red, very deluded chap launches himself down the slope.



"Yeaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah…"



"*Tenku* chaaaaaaaaaaammmmmp!" Yet despite the valiant scream…



… he manages to crash into the side of the mountain. Cut to in-game action instead.





Voiceover: "Enjoy yourself on a snowboard with *Tenkuuuuuuuuuuuu!*"

The first few sentences sound like this, "Uh muh muh," because that's what all editors sound like at 10.30am, when you've just woken up and they're trying to persuade you to theme your column around their issue. RedEye tries to focus. "Uh muh muh awards." Ears functioning. Good work. Need them tonight, at the gig. "You know the sort of thing, an irreverent retrospective. Your highlights and lowlights of the past year."
"Uhm. Right."
"Great. Gotta go. Look forward to reading it. Tomorrow. Your deadline's tomorrow." There's a pause. "Tomorrow," he reiterates. "Tomorrow."
"Okay."
"Tomorrow. Bye."
Click. Tomorrow. Ahaha. Back to sleep.

So, that's why we're here now, ladies and gentlemen, at 3am in the darkness of RedEye's study, hours of *Halo*/*Rez*/StruckDumbPopPunk



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

2001/2: a year of progress?

procrastination later. It is thirdperson; it is dizzy, it is blown lightbulbs and warm vodka and ears ringing from the band and a blank sheet of paper, and RedEye, slumped, surrounded by the gaming detritus washed up over the course of the last year. Oh, how far we've come. Couldn't be more glamorous. Roll out the red carpet, put on your best dress, and get ready to express mock surprise when it all ends in tears and acrimony and vapourware. The RedEye awards are here.

We won't linger on the major decorations. Game of the Year goes to *Halo*, for injecting life into a genre that the PC's been slowly strangling to death over the last five years, and showing that the key to genius isn't finding a one-trick-pony and flogging it (*Red Faction*, *Max Payne*), or in resurrecting a corpse (*Return to Castle Wolfenstein*). The answer is creativity and balance, and *Halo* has so, so much of both. So does Sega, who walks away with RedEye's Devco of the Year, games ranging from solid arcade conversions and franchises for the masses (*Virtua Fighter 4*, *Virtua Striker 3*, *Crazy Taxi 2*) to examples of irreplicable genius (*Rez*, *Super Monkey Ball*).

The minor trophies are much more interesting. The U R BIAST award for Excellence in Fanboyism: the Sony-despising Nintendo evangelists, little purple plastic blinkers still perfectly intact, for violent zealotry towards people who believe that the GC has little going for it except for one piece of Sega perfection, plenty of PS2 ports, and promises and updates. Is Rare going to go thirdparty? Maybe, maybe not, but either way you need to stop hyperventilating, put the razorblades down, and relax. For a group of people whose superficial philosophy is that "it's all about the games", there seems to be an awful lot of reticence to believe in the superlative platform attractiveness of *Jak and Daxter* or the pure raw beauty of *Ico*.

The Rattle and Pram award for Outstanding Industry Petulance: THQ, who issued a legally worded warning to all magazines that, in theory at least, barred publishers from using any screenshots of any THQ product if the attached copy was going to portray it in a negative light. Presumably **Edge**'s reviews of *Nightcaster* and *Red Faction* would have to be illustrated with courtroom-style artist's impressions. RedEye can think of plenty of ways to visually represent *Dark Summit*, although most of them are faecal.

The Here Comes The Sun award for Best PR Junket: putting aside some of the exceptional beyond-the-call-of-duty trips taken by dedicated editors in exchange for review scores, RedEye's favourite story has to be Vivendi's catastrophic attempt at wooing journalists in Paris. A tortuous coach journey to France for a 90-minute video, the meagre contents of which were splashed all over the Web within 20 minutes, an obligatory visit to a ropy strip club, and then, best of all, the PR guy Eurostars it back home on his own the next morning because he's too busy to suffer a coach journey. Star.

The Unfinished Business award for Excellence in Patching: Codemasters for taking the patch and verbally redefining it with Bohemian Interactive's post-release work on *Operation Flashpoint*. One 'Interim Upgrade' and three 'Content Upgrade Packs' proved that creeping release dates needn't be a technical burden or a PR nightmare. Indeed, with a ten quid add-on pack already out, and a 20 quid expansion pack scheduled for later this year, the publisher demonstrated that shipping your game half-intact can be as financially rewarding as it is morally reprehensible. A special mention to Microsoft, too, for bringing consoles to the patching party with its *DOA3* US add-on. By distributing it 'free' on the Official Xbox Magazine's coverdisk, it's saved gamers from having to spend vital energy deciding what magazine to read, too. Thank goodness someone's looking after us.

And the final award: Well-timed Moment of the Year, or at least of Tonight. Six hours ago, in the bar behind the venue, RedEye meets a friend he hasn't seen since college, years and years and years before. Usual catch-up stuff ensues, and it turns out this guy's a millionaire, or just out of jail, or both, or something. Not important. Before RedEye's had a chance say what he's doing these days – never did become an astronaut, never made the England team – his old acquaintance says this:

"Just bought a PS2. You seen one?"
Maybe.
"It's a different world, mate. Gonna get an Xbox too, I reckon," he nods at the luminescent Xs behind the bar. "Just amazing. It was different before, BBC vs Spectrum and *Skooldaze* and shit… seems so amateurish, y'know, in retrospect."

Unlike the professionalism of today's half-assed PR bribery, and the modern solidity of all those games released unfinished, eh? He's right, though:

Things have changed, and the last year has seen videogaming slip more into the arms of the mainstream than ever

desperate to grow up, for recognition, we track how far we've come every year, and the change is imperceptible, and we pull whiny faces and ask, "Are we nearly there yet?" Evolution, like that coach trip back from northern France, is so, so, slow. But things *have* changed, as people who've just returned to them notice, and the last year has seen videogaming slip more into the arms of the mainstream than ever. Our assimilation will continue. There is a TV in the corner showing some kind of football, but from this distance RedEye can't tell if it's a live game or *PES*. An anonymous DJ fades *Rival Schools* out over the sound system. As he makes his way back to the stage, RedEye walks past two girls twisting on *Dance Dance Revolution*. The band arrive. Noise, feedback, smiles. Happy new year.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge**'s

We have become so accustomed to seeing three-dimensional worlds realised on our screens that it is tempting to think that the problem has, effectively, been solved. All there is left for videogame environments in a technical sense is just more detail and better lighting. But there is still a common failing of videogame representation that threatens to ruin my absorption every time I notice it. It's this: even today, a lot of gameworlds don't seem solid. And if the illusion of solidity fails, I'm reminded that I'm just soaring through an insubstantial field of maths and pixels. A game such as *Rez* actually wants to induce such constructively alienating delirium, but in other genres this feeling is akin to a kind of cognitive seasickness.

Take *Virtua Fighter 4*, for instance. There I am, gratified at a good representation of a Shaolin fighting style (for once), enjoying the excellent training mode, teaching my AI student in an amusingly sadistic fashion (now, if I could just make him paint my fence and wax my car…). Then it hits me, and my heart sinks: like every 3D fighting game before it, *Virtua Fighter 4* suffers from Slippy Feet Syndrome. These martial artists have no relationship with the ground. It's not just an unrealistically friction-free relationship, it's a bizarre lack of communication between the soles of the feet and the earth. Shoes slip randomly in any direction for a couple of inches and then come to an instantaneous stop. It's as though the fighters have been badly bluescreened into a digital environment that is suffering a series of tiny earthquakes. The illusion of solidity, of contact between physical surfaces, breaks down.

Once you first notice it, Slippy Feet Syndrome is everywhere: more or less every modern thirdperson action game or FPS has it. And many driving games fall prey to the disease, in the form of Slippy Wheel Syndrome, when the tyres seem to be floating just above the tarmac. It is most noticeable in beat 'em ups, however, because we enjoy a consistently close-up view of the characters. It's there in *Dead or Alive 3*, too, which makes me wonder whether developers might hold back some of the processing surplus that is currently being spent on drawing pretty snowflakes to make sure that their fighters are actually standing on something.

Like other forms of physical incoherence, Slippy Feet Syndrome does not depend purely on visual cues: it can be ameliorated or worsened by information offered to the other senses. Despite its name, *MGS2* is not irreproachably solid, because the character under your control suffers from slippy feet, yet that flaw is at least made palatable by the variety of foot-ground interfaces on offer. Slipping on birdshit, splashing through puddles, or clanking unstealthily over grates provides audiovisual feedback that provides a much richer illusion of surface-to-surface interaction than do most games.

I'm picking on Slippy Feet Syndrome because it's a good example of how an apparently microscopic flaw can threaten to undermine so much creative and technical work in other aspects of a game. For the unfair truth is that as the worlds that videogame designers create become ever more complex and naturalistic, they can be ruined by ever smaller flaws, ever tinier holes in the logical fabric of the game universe. The world of, say, *Gradius Advance* is rock solid because it only has to process information in one plane, but adding a third dimension cubes the difficulty.

Then there are the really epic breakdowns of solidity, where the whole world rips apart as if it were made of digital tissue paper. *Wipeout Fusion*, take a bow: rockets and grenades don't trouble the track, yet your ship can actually fall through it if shunted in the right way. That should never, ever happen. Because it's one thing to want surfaces (as in feet and ground) to interact reliably, but I also want to be confident that the surface itself (the track) is physically solid and has depth.

For all its flaws, *Red Faction* represented a step in the right direction in this respect: blowing chunks out of a cave wall with the rocket launcher still made smoking holes even if it wasn't a specially designed destructible hotspot; and this worked to convince the player that he really was roaming below miles of igneous solidity, rather than encased in a two-dimensional, rock-textured shell with nothing but code-free void beyond.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Solidity: are modern games born slippy?

Meanwhile, in the wider game world, solidity still seems at a premium. Really rough collision detection, of the sort that used to let Lara Croft get her arm stuck in a door, is less common these days, but even now most games will at one time or another let you simply walk through an enemy. The cunning *Ico* seems to play with this problem by remaining deliberately ontologically undecided as to the physical status of its shadow monsters. You can walk through them, but they can hit you, and if you swing a wooden stick at them they fall apart.

Rough collision detection is less common these days, but even now most games will let you simply walk through an enemy

And if unnatural small movements of the pedal extremities can be annoying, what is there to say about larger breakdowns of solidity? The feet are one thing in beat 'em ups, but if that rankles, you'd better cover your eyes when a fighter gets to grappling. Whether it's *Tekken*, *Virtua Fighter* or *Dead or Alive*, grabs and throws simply look risible close up because the bodies do not intertwine with the slap and heft of real flesh. Doubtless this is a difficult technical problem, as changes in the stance or orientation of the opponent in real life require a corresponding change in the movements for any particular throwing technique, and so a different animation in the game. Never mind, say the developers, here's a flock of birds to distract you.

The fact remains that too many modern games just don't even feel as solid as *3D Ant Attack* or *Knight Lore* did. And if developers keep privileging fancy visual effects over tackling this problem seriously, then the realism so many of them seem to crave will never arrive.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

March is coming to an end, and I have been thinking about our previous CEO, Mr Okawa. When I joined Sega, 13 years ago, Okawa-san was the company's CEO. He was the man who, from nothing, built the first computer service company in Japan, CSK. He was the CEO of this company as well.

Back then, I saw him as the number one. I used to listen to his speeches in a wide conference hall, looking at him standing on the stage. To me, he was like someone above the clouds, far from reach. He had a unique manner. When you spoke to him, you started with jokes and continued with more serious work stuff, but he would always keep smiling.

In the following years, I learned a lot of things about my work and, gradually, I became more successful. Then after a few years, I was given my first sole directorship with *Daytona USA* and the game became a huge hit.

criticised but there were a few things I could not stand so I started to reply with force. Then it became quite an argument and I made a few points I had wanted to say for quite a while. The argument continued and I realised the difference in my own vision and the studio I was working for. This difference was so strong I had difficulty in keeping it inside me. This pushed me to go and see our president and tell him, "I would like you to get me out of the division I'm in now. If possible, I would like my own structure." After this, conversations followed one another with no progress. Every day was the same, negotiating, arguing with Sega's president. But my points and his never met.

Then six months later, the negotiations resulted in separate views, no agreement. I no longer had the will to continue this useless process. Then began the feelings of regret – I should not have made such a request. This just made my work harder now. Why

the same voice called me. "Please, enter." I was then shown inside a large office. I waited for two or three minutes, before Okawa-san entered from another door and said calmly, "Sorry for making you wait so long. So, what's the problem?"

With a certain energy I told him everything, all the emotion I had had inside me for a while. I still needed a few seconds to explain everything, but Okawa-san suddenly told me, "Wait." I stopped, thinking, "That's it. He's going to explode." Okawa-san went to the door and then, a little after, he returned.

In his hand, he had two bottles of beer. He gave me one and said, "You are too anxious. In your current condition you would only be able to tell me half of what you really mean. First let your anxiety out." Well, "Kanpai." (Cheers.) I felt much better. And so again, I explained my situation, my desire. He listened to me. At the end, Okawa-san said to me, "Thanks for coming to my office today. I'm grateful





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Rebel: with a cause

At the time of *Daytona USA*'s success, I was called to a party. It was a very happy time with people congratulating me from everywhere. Well, Okawa-san came to the party. Someone pointed me out to him and said, "His game is becoming a huge success right now." Okawa-san's reaction was austere with little emotion, "That's true." I didn't know how to react and was only able to reply, "Oh... yes." To be honest, I felt sad.

"Really? This is fantastic. You are a great man." Well, I wasn't expecting anything like this either. But I did expect a greater reaction from him. Anyway, you don't get such a chance everyday so I decided to speak a little longer with him. I told him, "I'm very surprised it became such a hit. It has been such fun making this title." "Oh, really," he replied. I thought, "What? Again?" I remember feeling so disappointed. This was the first time I had spoken to him.

Well, so what? If you think about it, the man had more than 10,000 people in his group. I would look small among all these people. He was not supposed to remember everybody's face. Then I had no other chance to speak with him for a while. And the only time I had the opportunity to listen to him, it was with everybody else during parties. That was all.

I continued my work and became more successful. That allowed me to participate in executive-level meetings. One day there was a problem regarding my section. I was heavily

had I suddenly pushed myself with insistence like that? To be honest, my work was not going bad at all. I mean I could have continued like before. It was okay. I figured I had nobody to ask for advice. But just as I had decided to give up hope, I remembered one name, Okawa-san.

you came to talk to me." I was delighted. I had succeeded in communicating my request to the top. I had the feeling that I wouldn't mind if it met with a favourable reaction or not. Anyway, I was very excited. I thanked him. And as I was about to leave, I heard him telling me these words that I would never

I figured I had nobody to ask for advice. But just as I had decided to give up hope, I remembered one name, Okawa-san

But would he listen to the request of just one employee? Even if I went there I would not be accepted. I mean, I wasn't sure they would let me in. However, I had nobody else to speak to about my situation. As one of his group's employees, I thought it couldn't be a mistake to bring my problem to his attention. So gathering all my courage, I decided to make an appointment with him.

The day after, I went to the office of CSK's president for a 2pm appointment. I arrived early, anxious, and waited. The clock displayed 2pm and still no one called me. Ten minutes passed. Thirty. And still nothing. At 3pm, at last, I was called. However, the female voice was sorry and asked me to wait a little longer. But I was very anxious. I mean if he was so busy, he should feel very irritated. What if I brought him my request in such a condition? He would certainly get angry with me. Perhaps I should go back to my office? It was just at this moment that

forget, "You know, telling people what you think is good. You should do it more often. Plus, didn't you tell me you were enjoying your work before? I want people like you to keep on. Keep up the good work." I was so surprised. I mean this was the second time I had spoken with him face to face. The first time was that party years before. I was so impressed he could remember our conversation. I couldn't stop crying on my way back. I really thought I had joined a great company.

After a while, I had my own department after the division of the company had been decided. Thinking about this now, it was the foundation of Amusement Vision and myself today. It is now one year since Okawa-san died. Even now I still feel impressed. I hope he has a peaceful and happy life in paradise.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4





TOKYO GAME LIFE

Lupin Kojima, sub editor-in-chief, 'Game Wave DVD'

Kojima-san is tempted by Xbox's broadband capabilities

Hello to game fans all over the world. This is Lupin Kojima from Japan. In my life or at work, at 'Game Wave DVD', I'm very in touch with videogames. Through my column, I hope to present to you what has had an impact on me lately. Once again, I would like to make a few points, a little in extension of last month's column, concerning two games that are haunting me all the time, and Microsoft's Xbox.

My company, Enterbrain, is located at Sangenjaya, two stations from Shibuya. So, when we go to work or, as I am right now on my way to a meeting, we usually pass by Shibuya, on the train or by car. Anyway, February's Shibuya was dressed with Microsoft's Xbox signs everywhere. Even people who are barely aware of videogames were intrigued by such a demonstration. To be honest, I was impressed. But, at the same time, although I admired the vast scale of the promotion, I couldn't help thinking one thing, one doubt rising up inside me: "Why should I play on the Xbox?" This question haunted me, particularly one day, while I was driven by car to an arcade. Even listening to all the Xbox adverts, considering all the information displayed in the media, television and magazines, I couldn't find one single thing to get my attention.

December, then January, and February, now, today: when I find a little time, I play fiercely with *Virtua Fighter 4* in the arcade, and the beta version of *Final Fantasy XI*. This has become my everyday life. The more I play these games, the more I want to like them. At the end of January, I met some players who had come to Japan from Hong Kong and the UK, just to play *VF4*. One of my friends, CathaO, a games journalist (and also one of Japan's top *VF4* players), introduced them to me. I was planning to interview them, but instead I just played with them. That's all. I felt that was sufficient; it would have been useless to do a formal interview with them.

But really, the point is that playing with them was really fun. Now I'm thinking about it, that's all I can remember about playing with them – that it was fun. There was a difference in our playing style, because there is no card system in Hong Kong or the UK. But, if you have one common favourite game, even if you cannot speak the same language, I realised that it was possible to enjoy the same experience, to share the same fun together. By the way, when a character is squatting down and punching, there is common word among fighting game users, 'Shagapan,' for the squatting punch. These guys were using Japanese expressions such as, "Shagapan, kitsui," – "The Squatting punch is hard." I could not stop laughing. It showed me that games could be a very powerful driving force.

Then I went home to *FFXI*, the beta version. I think the final version will appear sometime at the beginning of spring. Here again, I play every day. To have a clear vision of the game; I would describe it as similar to *Everquest*. Anyway, if I had to explain what is that good about this game, I would say it makes me feel like my character is a real person. I can interact with all the other beta test users all across Japan; I fight with them, exchange items and even chat about irrelevant but fun stuff. From the time I started playing with *FFXI* beta, I made friends in Osaka, Nagoya and Hokkaido. I have not met them, but we exchange greetings naturally, starting with good evening and logging out with good night. Just thinking about the possibility of doing the same with users all over the world… I can't possibly imagine how I could work, or even sleep.

Last year, I did an interview with Microsoft's managing director, Hirohisa Ohura. I think it was sometime at the end of October. Back then, the main selling points of Xbox was that it had a hard drive and a broadband network feature: the fact that it would open users to a totally new frontier, a new experience. To be honest, even after speaking with the managing director, until I played *FFXI* I had no attraction for network gaming. I had difficulty getting involved with the computer world, because PC hardware often requires advanced handling. But, progressively, the 'network' feature has entered the arcade world, and come across to consoles. It makes the future of gaming look much brighter. Well, since I am so in love with videogames, perhaps my vision may be not accurate, but I think everyone who is continuously in contact with games should think the same.

However, even now I still have no emotion regarding Xbox. I think it is because there are no exciting titles. Looking at the big logo on the top of the console, I remember what they told me before. "Using its network feature, Xbox will be like an exclusive theme park, offering various attractions." "Exclusive" means only on Xbox, only possible on Xbox. "Theme park" means various attractions, a variety of genres to enjoy. This is how I understood his words. So, even if there is nothing exciting about the console right now, in the very near future a very enjoyable network gaming experience should come through on Xbox. In that sense, buying an Xbox is like investing in the future, investing in the "Future of gaming". And the result? The result is Shibuya, massively decorated with Xbox logos.

"So, even if there is nothing exciting right now, in the very near future an enjoyable network gaming experience should come through on Xbox"

Well, it's not the right time to think about that, especially when I'm going to be late for my meeting. But I can't stop thinking about this. Okay, so am I going to buy an Xbox with *DOA3* on my way back from work? I think about the future and the adverts I will go past… but no, wait, I still have two months of rent to pay. So, no. I'm going to wait for a while. I'm busy with work (games), and my hobbies (games). My February vision (dream?) of Tokyo Game Life.

Lupin Kojima is the sub editor-in-chief of 'Game Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio

Edge's most wanted

Robotech
Arriving too late to examine in more detail this issue, the Xbox version of the seminal anime series boasts some of the most attractive cel-shading seen to date.



(Xbox) TDK Mediactive

Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic
Despite *Jedi Knight II* falling short of our expectations (and indeed recommendations), BioWare's name remains a sure fire guarantee of quality.



(PC/Xbox) Activision

Final Fantasy XI
Reports of a world of blandness have been put to rest and **Edge**'s own beta tester will testify to the game's ability to hold you under its spell for endless hours.



(PlayStation2) Square

City of Desperation
Having played through GameCube *Biohazard* this month, **Edge** is looking forward to the similarly tense atmosphere of the first survival earthquake title.



(PlayStation2) TBC

It's got a lot of potential...

... but it remains to be seen whether...

Videogame previews demand a leap of faith; it's impossible to tell how good a game is going to be without playing the finished version extensively – which is a bit of a Catch 22. In order to get round the situation, **Edge** is forced to consider a number of factors that might give some indication as to the likely quality of the finished product. We're forced to fall back on the reputation, of publisher, developer, or franchise; or of early promise, shown by screenshots, video footage, or playable preview code; or a combination of the two.

On the positive side, this predicament does allow **Edge** to write about, and applaud, the most interesting, the most original, or even the most quirky, facets of game design without having to temper our admiration just because these haven't been executed adequately.

On the downside, it lays **Edge** open to accusations of bias, or of falling for marketing hype, if a game that shows early potential turns out to fall short of the expectations raised by previews. Very few readers remember that the execrable *Rise of the Robots* received a Testscreen rating of two out of ten in **E**17; only that **Edge** dignified it with a cover in **E**3. This issue's Testscreen section contains a review of *Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* (p97), which has appeared regularly in **Edge**'s Most Wanted column in recent months. But despite the quality of the game's publisher, developer and franchise, and despite early footage and screenshots that suggested much promise, the game is a significant disappointment.

This is simply one of the risks of including a preview section, and it's not going to go away. Nor will the continued occurrence of games that either don't turn up (*Galleon*, *The Getaway*, *Republic*, to name but a few) or that turn up apparently out of nowhere (*Advance Wars*, *Frequency*, *Ico* to name an equal few).

As with every issue, there is no guarantee that the titles featured in this month's Prescreen section will deliver on their early promise. In the case of *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*, Eidos simply isn't giving enough information away to judge. The new *Broken Sword* will ultimately depend on the quality of its narrative and puzzles, which can't be assessed fairly at preview stage. And though *Reign of Fire* boasts some well-conceived play mechanics, it's still too early in development to know how well these will be implemented. You'll just have to wait until they appear in **Edge**'s Testscreen section.





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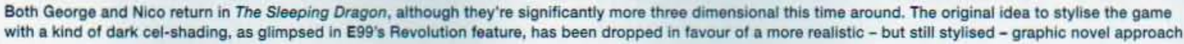


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Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon

Fans have been waiting nearly five years for the next chapter in the Broken Sword saga. Now, Revolution has released the first screens detailing George and Nico's return





Both George and Nico return in *The Sleeping Dragon*, although they're significantly more three dimensional this time around. The original idea to stylise the game with a kind of dark cel-shading, as glimpsed in E99's Revolution feature, has been dropped in favour of a more realistic – but still stylised – graphic novel approach





Revolution lives in a studio on a cobbled street just off the river Ouse in York, a city built on stone-wall mythology and maintained by tourism. Revolution's art-house reputation is also built from fragments of the past, on the legend of the Templar Knights, on the *Broken Sword* series; two outstanding graphic adventures

"We're keen to allow players to perform full range of moves expected in a 3D environment – jumping, climbing, shimmying..."

that created such a fervent, dedicated following that a third instalment was inevitable. The problem is that while *Broken Sword* redefined what people would expect from the point 'n' click genre, the genre itself was dying. Right or wrong, post-PlayStation, two dimensions are passé. Developing a follow-up would require a more three-dimensional outlook.

"The interface has been a challenge," **Tony Warriner**, a director at Revolution and co-designer of *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*, explains. "But we're proud of the results. We're keen to allow players to not only perform the actions available in a traditional adventure – that is, manipulating objects, interacting with the environments, having conversations, and so on – as well as the full range of moves expected in a 3D environment – jumping, climbing, shimmying, fighting... At all times we were conscious of the need to keep the interface very simple – pick up and go."

Broadly speaking, *The Sleeping Dragon*'s game mechanics separate into three elements; puzzle solving, which will be familiar to all fans of the previous *Broken Sword* games; exploration and stealth, a feature born out of the introduction of 3D environments; and Revolution's self-termed 'Action Events'. Most similar to *Shenmue*'s QTE system, these are pre-scripted animations performed by the character during cut-scenes, and controlled by the player through a intuitive icon map, unique to each event. Events can be brief – for example, diving out of the way of a car – or longer, during the game's choreographed fight sequences. While perhaps not as freeform as some gamers might want, it maintains the cinematic flow that gave the studio its reputation. Also helpful is the game's distinctive, gently caricatured appearance.

"We've settled on something that's clearly *Broken Sword*-style – but which takes full



The settings may seem rather sparse, but these early screenshots are intended to illustrate the look and feel of the environments



Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC, PC, GBA**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Revolution**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q3 2003**







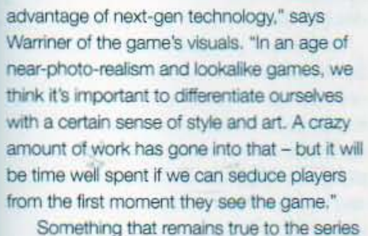




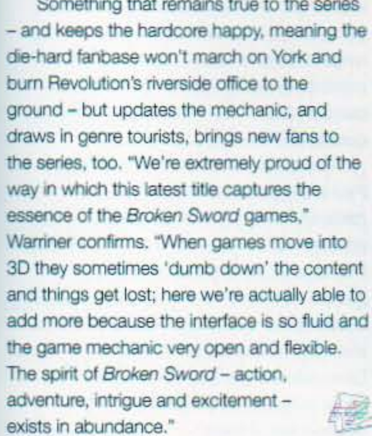








advantage of next-gen technology," says Warriner of the game's visuals. "In an age of near-photo-realism and lookalike games, we think it's important to differentiate ourselves with a certain sense of style and art. A crazy amount of work has gone into that – but it will be time well spent if we can seduce players from the first moment they see the game."



Something that remains true to the series – and keeps the hardcore happy, meaning the die-hard fanbase won't march on York and burn Revolution's riverside office to the ground – but updates the mechanic, and draws in genre tourists, brings new fans to the series, too. "We're extremely proud of the way in which this latest title captures the essence of the *Broken Sword* games," Warriner confirms. "When games move into 3D they sometimes 'dumb down' the content and things get lost; here we're actually able to add more because the interface is so fluid and the game mechanic very open and flexible. The spirit of *Broken Sword* – action, adventure, intrigue and excitement – exists in abundance."





While the locations are fully 3D, the perspectives are fixed, *Ico*-style, which, as well as providing the cinematic feel the designers are seeking, will sidestep problems associated with thirdperson cameras

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness

Eidos announces a new dark direction for Lara's latest outing, but isn't giving out too much detail about gameplay details for the PS2 console-exclusive title





Preview footage shown at Pacha only revealed a few tantalising glimpses of the game proper. Even so, expect Lara's acrobatics to return

In case there was any doubt as to the importance of the next chapter of Lara Croft's escapades to Eidos, Core, Sony and gamers round the world, **Chris Barrie** was on hand at the publisher's recent announcement at Pacha London to reiterate it. Better known as 'Red Dwarf's Rimmer, or indeed Lara's dependable butler, Hillary, he outlined some astonishing statistics. "To date the five *Tomb Raider* games have sold a staggering 28 million units worldwide. Assuming *Tomb Raider* owners have each spent a conservative estimate of 30 hours playing the game, then a total of 840 billion hours have been spent playing with Lara Croft. That's 95,890 years. If the boxes that the games were sold in were stacked in a pile, they'd be 70,000 times higher than the Statue of Liberty, and if the boxes were laid down end to end, they would stretch all the way from England to Egypt and back." And in case there was still any doubt, he went on to add: "*Tomb Raider* is a legend. Lara Croft is an icon all around the world."

The original *Tomb Raider* was a revelation when it appeared in 1996. It also rapidly became synonymous with the PlayStation generation, despite initially appearing on Sega's Saturn. But by the fifth episode, the game engine was showing its age, its platforming dynamic was predictable and the series was in danger of oversaturation.

After a self-imposed exile of 18 months, which has apparently been spent developing a new game engine and a new darker direction for the game's heroine, Lara Croft is back, starring in *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* for PlayStation2 and PC.

"It's no longer a clear-cut case of good versus evil. This is a more complex tale, which will ask more complex questions of the player"





Angel of Darkness features a custom-built game engine, designed to get the most out of PlayStation2. Expect more sophisticated character models, subtler lighting effects and more cinematic cut-scenes



Although Lara was last seen in a collapsing Egyptian tomb, the action in *Angel of Darkness* ranges across new territory, from Paris to Prague, and explores a darker side of the game's eponymous heroine

Indeed, despite leaving its heroine stranded inside a collapsing Egyptian tomb at the end of the fourth game in the series, Eidos' decision to bring Lara back to life can't have surprised anyone.

The preview video footage shown at the Pacha announcement did an excellent job of heightening anticipation for the next episode without revealing too many details of the game's mechanics. "To create something on this scale," noted Core Design's **Adrian Smith**, "it was necessary to take ideas and production values from the film industry, in the way they research the subject, the backstory they create for their characters, and the depth of the visuals." And it showed. There were overtones of the *MGS2* E3 preview footage, and an obvious shift towards a more gothic, adult tone, with members of the development team quoting influences such as David Fincher and Hieronymous Bosch.

The plot, which the publisher was prepared to reveal, sees Lara tracking down one of five 14th century artworks on behalf of a shady client. Her travails transport her from Paris to Prague and soon draw her into underworld dealings, alchemical experimentation, and a history of vengeance spanning hundreds of years. Allusions to Jack the Ripper in the preview footage were particularly interesting, and a fair sign of the direction that the new chapter will take.

In terms of gameplay, Jeremy Heath-Smith's claim that the preview video consisted of 85 per cent in-game footage was probably disingenuous. Certainly, Lara's hallmark acrobatics will be making a return, apparently along with stealth sections. But the game will also feature RPG-style elements of interaction with NPCs, and Lara's responses will affect the outcome of a dynamic storyline. "It's no longer a clear-cut case of good versus evil," pointed out Adrian Smith. "This is a more complex tale, which will ask more complex questions of the player."

The quality of the early footage shown at Pacha suggests that *Angel of Darkness* certainly has the potential to be as revelatory an instalment as the very first *Tomb Raider*. But whether the eventual execution of the game's mechanics proves to be as successful awaits further disclosure. What is certain is that *Angel of Darkness* won't mark the end of Lara's labours. As Smith pointed out, "It's going to open a lot of doors but only closes a few of them."



Format: **PS2, PC**
Publisher: **Eidos Interactive**
Developer: **Core Design**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **November 15**













The appearance of SWAT-style guards (above) bears an obvious resemblance to the E3 preview footage of *Metal Gear Solid 2*. The parallels were reinforced by scenes in which Lara stealthily creeps up to dispatch unwary guards with a lethal use of force (left)

Reign of Fire

It's raining fire from the skies in Bam! Entertainment's latest movie tie-in, which is showing considerable signs of early promise





As in *Halo*, early missions pitch the player into the thick of the action without being too demanding. Later missions incorporate a diverse set of goals, including convoy protection

Bam! Entertainment's movie tie-in release strategy is set to continue with *Reign of Fire*, currently under development by Kuju Entertainment. The game is based on Spyglass Entertainment's movie of the same name, (which, interestingly, stars Izabella Scorupco – better known to gamers as the rather irritating Natalya in *GoldenEye*). Whereas the publisher's previous movie tie-in, *Ecks Vs Sever*, was released too far in advance to take advantage of the movie it was based upon, the signs are more positive for *Reign of Fire*. For a start, the game will be released relatively shortly after the movie, but in addition the movie looks likely to profit from some hefty, summer blockbuster-style promotion.

In any case, Kuju is keen that its game should succeed on its own merits. Although the team has benefited by using development resources from the movie, the licensing process itself has actually been fairly flexible. The game follows the plot of the film, which takes place in Britain, during the year 2024, against a backdrop of a world that has been decimated by newly reawakened dragons. Initially, players take on the role of a member of Van Zan's Irregulars – a squad of US dragon slayers on a quest from a ruined Norfolk fort to post-apocalyptic London, the heart of the dragon stronghold. Eventually though, it is possible to play the game on the other side of the conflict, as a massively powerful dragon. Whereas the human campaign revolves around vehicle combat, playing as a dragon is intended to be a more visceral affair, allowing players to rain fire freely from the air.

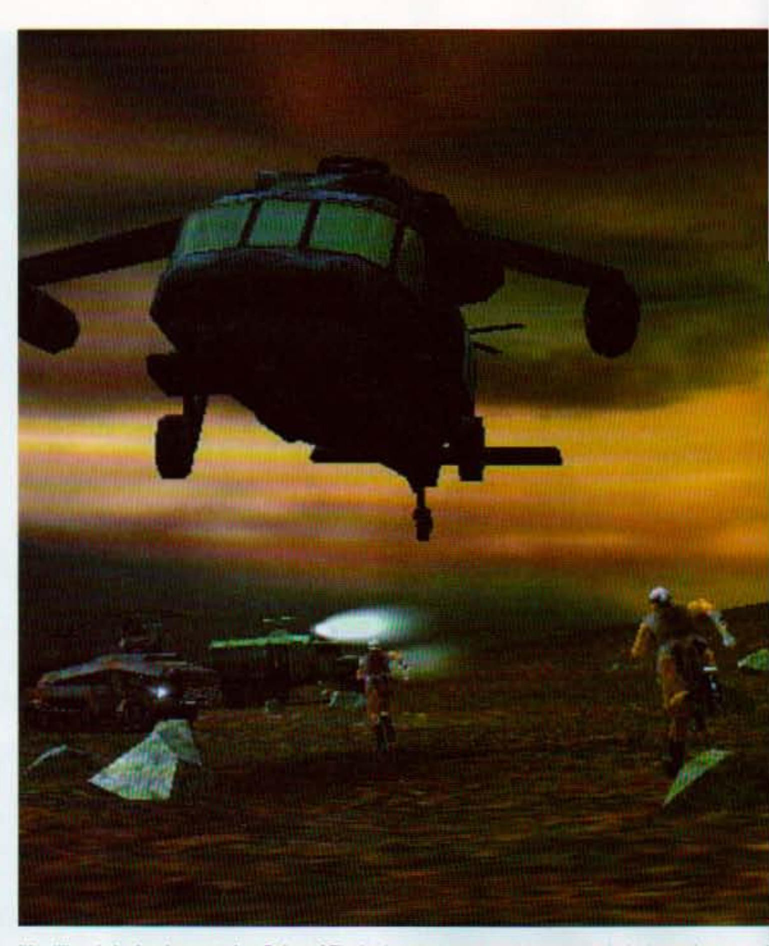


"The player is a member of a squad of US dragon slayers on a quest from a ruined Norfolk fort to post-apocalyptic London"

Although the team has been able to draw on successive drafts of the movie script, it was never obliged to follow it exclusively. Thus the majority of the game's early cannon fodder is provided by Jackals, a smaller, land-based dragon variant, present in early drafts of the script, but absent from the finished film. Similarly, lead artist, Tancred Dyke-Wells, was able to use pre-production movie maquettes for the design of in-game character models, and the company's offices are currently bedecked with the team's own impressive range of production assets.



During the human campaigns, a number of specialised vehicles extends the possibilities. The dragon missions are more instinctive



It's still early in development, but *Reign of Fire* is already demonstrating great technical promise, as wel a number of intriguing play mechanics, exemplified by the game's overlapping two-pronged structure

One area that the team won't be able to draw on is the movie's musical soundtrack. "Judging from what we've seen, they've gone for a very orchestral style of music," explains executive producer, **Mark Washbrook**. "But our terrain system is streamed from CD, which limits the amount of streamed audio we can use, so we're likely to go for a more atmospheric style of music. Where possible, we'll use as many sound effects from the movie as we can."

This bezier patch terrain system, which generates landscapes via geometry streamed from CD, is just one aspect of the developer's technical achievement to show early promise. And although it obviously plays to the Vector Unit strengths of the PlayStation2, the engine is already running on Xbox. Lead designer, **Alex Cullum** also highlights the team's flexible customised scripting system. But the real accomplishment will be to bring the reptilian majesty of the game's saurian protagonists t life. To this end, the game also features a dynamic fire system to mimic the spread of real fire, which works by assigning every iter in the game with a comprehensive set of properties, such as heat damage and heat distribution. Significant parts of the game require the management of the spread of fire either limiting it on the human side or exacerbating it as a dragon.

And there's also the animation system. "The player dragons are skinned animated objects, and what we've been aiming for, wit a dynamic system of blended animation, is t create what looks like an organic dragon, wit an immediate sense of control," explains Cullum. "You're not held up by going throug animation cycles before you can move."





Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **BAM! Entertainment**
Developer: **Kuju Entertainment**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Autumn**











Dynamically modelled fire is an important factor in the game. When later missions provide the opportunity to take control of dragons, it's possible to shoot damaging projectiles or breathe firestarting bursts of flame

It's still early in development but the game is also set to feature some interesting mechanics. First there's the overlapping campaign structure, with some levels playable on both sides of the conflict. And though driving shoot 'em ups have a chequered past, the signs are positive that the team has mastered the art of combative driving, with weapons controlled independently of vehicle movement. A diverse set of objectives is also welcome, with tasks ranging from protecting convoys to firefighting. One mission, inspired by a scene in the film, features the placement of three weapon triangulators.

Ultimately the execution of these play mechanics, and the successful fruition of early technical promise will be responsible for the game's success or failure. But there's no doubt that box office exposure will lend the title a welcome commercial fillip.



Vehicle-based shoot 'em ups have historically suffered from a lack of precise control. *Reign of Fire* introduces independent aiming and, hopefully, automatic handbrake turns to make strafing a possibility



What car?

The inclusion of four vehicle types should lend a welcome degree of variation to *Reign of Fire*'s human campaign. The Mini Buggy is, predictably, lightly armoured but extremely manoeuvrable, while the Abrams Tank is, equally predictably, slow but tough. The Jeep sits somewhere between the two, while a 4x4 Fire Truck is armed with a water cannon with which to douse flames. Vehicles are each equipped with two weapons, though power-ups augment one of these – essentially bringing the number up to three.

MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Climax Brighton**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **June**

Previously in **E**105

Two-wheel racing games have never really taken off in Europe, but with a strong licence and superb handling, Climax hopes to bring the motorbike racing sim to the masses

At last – a racing game comes along that tries something different and, on 90 per cent complete code, seems to have pulled it off supremely well. Rather than adopt the simplistic traditional left/right accelerate control method of other motorbike games, Climax has decided to add an element of its own. In *MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology* your rider's position on the bike can be controlled with the left analogue stick. Moving him backwards, when going into corners, increases wind resistance, thus helping to brake more sharply. Tilting your rider forwards, so his head goes down beneath the windshield, helps increase acceleration out of corners.

Combined with the standard control mechanism it could have all become a bit messy, but it works beautifully. Additional refinements include powersliding (by applying the throttle after braking) and pulling wheelies (predominantly to impress the crowds). True MotoGP fans will also be delighted to hear that slipstreaming is a big factor in the game and adds an element of tactical racing missing from Namco's mostly bland interpretations of the sport.

But the game is not just a stuffy simulation-based racer – reach high speeds on the longer straights and a *Burnout*-style blurring effect kicks in, dramatically increasing the adrenaline rush. There are also a number of unlockable novelty filters, including a vibrant cel-shaded look and even a 'Take On Me'-style sketch effect (a look that can be enhanced by ripping A-ha's original tune to the Xbox hard drive).

Win enough championship points and the Sheridan track can be opened. More intrepid riders will discover a facsimile of Climax's Brighton offices down a side-path. Enter the basement and a decent bat 'n' ball arcade game can be accessed.

All the usual options make the game: weather effects, quick race and qualifying options, even a choice of bikes, riders and leathers. But it's the addition of a smooth 16-player link-up feature (**Edge** can attest to its ability to bring out the competitive instincts) that really impresses. *MotoGP* offers a comprehensive package which could finally do the official licence proud and seems destined to be the best in motorbike racing to emerge in a good few years.





Grass stains

While the visuals seem decent enough at first glance, it is only when one stops to take a good look around that the detail becomes apparent. Grass and tarmac textures are incredibly rich, while individual raindrops on the windshield reflect the surrounding world, albeit in inverted form. Such effects may be lost at high speeds, but take a few tumbles in your leathers and the niceties of the ground will become very familiar.













Although only ten of the official tracks make the game, each has been recreated with inch-perfect precision. Sun-glare effects (above) are done with greater delicacy than most racing games, while motion blur (top right) conveys a tremendous sense of speed. Good racers should be able to unlock the many filters (right)



Raging Bless

Format: PlayStatio
Publisher: Pacific Century CyberWor
Developer: In-hou
Origin: Jap
Release: June (Japan), TBC (U

A band of medieval heroes head for some hack and slash questing. But will they be able to capture imaginations as well as Ax Battler, Tyris Flare and Gilius Thunderhead?





The top bar represents the player's health, while the bar underneath shows their magic power. Twoplayer combat promises to be furiously unsubtle



Raging Bless' emphasis is firmly on multiplayer participation, allowing players to join a quest already in play. Unfortunately, cooperative play is limited to two players, an axe in the face for *Gauntlet* fans

Pacific Century CyberWorks began as a company in Hong Kong, specialising in telecommunication. However, the purchase of Jaleco opened up opportunities in the videogame market. Its cancellation of *Unison 2* didn't bode well, but it appears that it was a smokescreen, hiding real ambition. Now it's revealed *Raging Bless*, a pleasant surprise, and something that may particularly interest retro fetishists. If *Maximo* is a homage to *Ghouls n Ghosts*, then this is one to *Golden Axe*.

Set in a fantastical medieval world, *Raging Bless* plays a little like *Shin Sangokumusou 2*, except with fewer onscreen enemies. Story mode is the focus, with the player choosing one of four heroes available (there are two more hidden): a knight, a follower of the martial arts, a wizard and a barbarian warrior. Naturally, each has his own style of combat with advantages anc disadvantages – although there are also branching paths unique to each fighter – and equally naturally, a boss awaits at the end of each level. Multiplayer options let players share the adventure in cooperative mode, or enjoy collective slaughter in fourplayer Duel mode, where enemy characters are playable. A third mode, Full Attack, enables you to choose any hero in Story mode, and evolve them by running them through a series of training courses.

Technically, *Raging Bless* appears to be impressive, with some excellent 3D effects – the grass in particular – and high quality textures. The characters are particularly detailed, but some locations seem oddly sparse, empty, simple. But then the game mechanic is characterised by simplicity, too.

In addition to the analogue movement, there are only two buttons, block and attack, though that doesn't prevent a variety of action in combat: dashing, side-stepping (blocking combined with movement), charging (attacks based on the power of the character), special moves, and so on. A rada indicates the positions of the enemies arounc you, and characters can be equipped with a variety of different items and magic abilities, the power of which are illustrated by a meter alongside the life gauge.

We've seen it all before, of course: apparently 90 per cent complete, *Raging Bless* appears to offer last-gen entertainment with next-gen polish, but derivative doesn't mean redundant, remember. *Maximo* showed just how good the art of homage can be.



GunGrave

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Smilebit/Red Entertainment**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **July (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Sega's decision to take a controlling stake in Red Entertainment has been rewarded with an impressive cel-shaded action title



GunGrave's anime aesthetic matches the intense action on offer, and benefits from the established manga credentials of Red Entertainment's development team

One of the more interesting titles on display at the recent Game JAM expo was Red Entertainment's *GunGrave*. Now that the *Sakura Taisen* developer has been fully incorporated into the Sega fold, it's working with Smilebit on a cel-shaded mech title which boasts some impressive manga credentials. The development team includes several high profile alumni from the manga industry including 'Trigun' creator, Naito Yasuhiro, who is responsible for the concept and character design, and Fujishima Kosuke, the creator of the 'Oh My Goddess' manga strip, who is overseeing mech design.

Gameplay bears certain similarities to *Devil May Cry*, and involves dispatching relentless waves of enemies throughout a series of interior and exterior locations. Performing successive combos eventually fills up a special attack gauge to permit more powerful attacks, and the game ranks your performance according to how stylish your death-dealing is.

It's not yet the finished product; given the rapidity of the action, an automatic targeting lock-on would be an improvement on the manual one featured and the inexorable flow of enemies can produce a repetitive gameplay rhythm. But minor niggles such as these and a slightly clumsy camera aside, **Edge**'s expectations remain high.





The relentless flow of enemies can get slightly monotonous, but there's still time to hone the finer points of the game's design and structure

Surveillance

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEI**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **April (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Recalling interactive films Voyeur and Night Trap on the Mega CD, will Surveillance offer more freedom than the genre has traditionally delivered, or must gamers still like to watch?





Surveillance looks beautiful enough, no question. But it's all prerendered, and that's unlikely to offer gamers the kind of freedom they desire



Hotspots on the image will mark areas with which the viewer can interact. Other available cameras are always visible along the bottom of the screen

Surveillance arrives thanks to SCEI's continued wish to use the DVD-video aspect of its console: a part of the machine that may yet prove incompatible with good games. The game mechanic here hardly gives cause to think otherwise. The player is charged with monitoring several screens to follow action in different places, and, as the word monitor implies, that means most of the time you're just watching. Interaction is limited to identifying objects or characters with a cursor; for example counting all of the terrorists present in a room or recognising the type of weapon that they carry, allows your allies to act appropriately.

Another situation sees the player as a member of a commando team dealing with communications on board an armoured truck. The objective is to inform the team of events around them, making use of various cameras. Cameras can be deactivated by terrorists, but the commandos can install up to six more. If a member of the team dies, it's Game Over and restart; except now what's going to happen has already been revealed, and they can react with foresight accordingly. Predictably, it looks like *Surveillance* is destined to fall into the same category the interactive film always has done: the exceptionally pretty memory test.

Kung Fu Chaos

Format: Xb
Publisher: Micros
Developer: Just Add Monste
Origin: U
Release: (

Partly inspired by the '70s warblings of Carl Douglas, Kung Fu Chaos is going against tradition by injecting an element of slapstick into the martial arts beat 'em up





Pirate ships, Hong Kong movie sets and dinosaur theme parks will provide the backdrops to *Kung Fu Chaos*. But would Bruce Lee have approved?

Most proponents of Kung Fu would prefer their discipline to remain a little bit frightening. However, Microsoft seems determined to lose its stuffy corporate image by portraying the art as a fun and slapstick affair. Present images suggest the move is inspired. Rather than learn a bewildering number of standard moves the game focuses on a few key attacks enhanced by a variety of over-the-top specials. Gigantic leaps, 'suicidal' stunts and multiple 'hilarious' moves are promised.

Ridiculously monickered characters replace the usual bunch of Jeffreys and Ryus. Candi Roll, Xui Tan Sour, Ninja Fu Hiya and Chop & Styx are just some of the characters to feature. Backdrops are as vibrant as the protagonists and up to four players can clash against interactive film sets in true Hong Kong style. But just how much impact the game furniture has on the gameplay remains to be seen.

The soundtrack from 'Enter the Dragon' and Carl Douglas' 'Kung Fu Fighter' will accompany the action. But perhaps of most interest is the power-up mechanism which consists of taunts that can add to the impacts. Developer, Just Add Monsters, wants the player to be able, not just to beat their opponent, but to humiliate them as much as possible in the process.



Hopefully the 3D arenas will be as consistent and navigable as those in the *Power Stone* titles. Special attacks may see your character jumping out of the screen, landing on a foe, and committing suicide as a grand finale

Mazan: Flash of the Blade

Format: Arca
Publisher: Nam
Developer: In-hou
Origin: Japa
Release: Sprin

Lightgun gaming is dead. Lightswords are the latest arcade weapon against consoles. That is, until Ascii comes up with a home version of this new peripheral. Probably

When Konami's *Tsurugi* came along it attempted to place the player in the role of a highly disciplined samurai warrior, but dodgy motion technology rendered the experience rather laughable. However, the grain of the idea was certainly worth nurturing and now Namco is attempting to improve matters with the more fluid, *Mazan: Flash of the Blade*.

The principles are the same, of course, but present news suggests that Namco's effort is a good deal more refined than Konami's with onscreen opponents reacting to the katana light-blade with a great deal of accuracy. Interestingly, an ultimate strike has been included which can propel enemies back several metres. First, a block must be performed, followed by specific strikes, and then the killing blow can be executed.

Another improvement over *Tsurugi* is the addition of breakable scenery. Decorations can be cut to shreds while doors and beams will splinter after several blows. It is still uncertain if this has any impact on progress or has merely been included to appease more aggressive players during the quieter moments. But those wishing to recreate some of the finer moments from 'Seven Samurai' may well be very impressed by the final build.



Much of the scenery, such as the bamboo shoots (above), can be shredded at a stroke. But it's probably best to see to the enemy first





Don't expect foes to run at you stupidly. Many have missile attacks and good blocking is vital

Otostaz

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEI**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Spring**

Capcom's One Piece Mansion offered budding builders the chance to play landlord. Now Sony, eager to go one better, gives gamers a town-planning puzzle game



Fail to eliminate black houses in time, and they'll collapse, leaving lines of unusable land. For those curious to know if this furiously kinetic cartoon approach is akin to how Akihabara arrived at its compact labyrinthine form: no, silly

Otostaz won't be Sony's biggest game of the year, far from it. But it is a good example of a new part of SCEI's PS2 policy: produce simple ideas, products that can be worked quickly and to a high standard, games designed for everyone. It's a concept born from the idea of Internet gaming and cross-Net competition, and is particularly pertinent as Sony prepares to take its console online.

Otostaz isn't an online game at the moment, but it's certainly a long-term candidate. The idea is akin to a horizontal *Tetris*, scrolling from right to left. The field of play is divided into squares on which one places icons: either ground, water, or wood. The combination of the three makes it possible to build houses. Arranging houses into groups makes it possible to obtain better buildings, which in turn gives a higher score.

The game gets more complex as time progresses, with the introduction of indestructible mountains and black houses that need to be converted as fast as possible.

As well as the standard Puzzle mode, there's a Scenario mode with various areas to be urbanised according to instructions. Where the game may fall, though, is in the apparent complexity of its internal rules; it seems strange for a game based on the premise of simplicity to require so much learning effort on the part of the player.





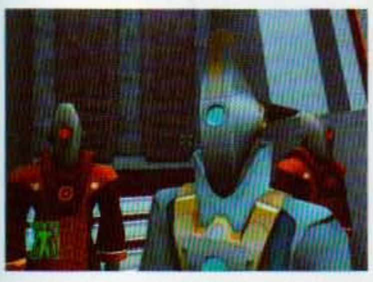
The puzzle mode looks like it offers a more relaxed chance to build, unlike the non-stop scrolling tomfoolery of the *Tetris*-style game

Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **Warthog**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **TBC**

Warthog plunders the final frontier for its Xbox debut: melding firstperson action with its stock in trade – the space simulation





The near-future timeframe of *Mace Griffin* means that the game's aesthetic is slightly more retro than you might expect from a sci-fi shooter



While the seamless transition between interior and exterior locations is technically impressive, it's unclear how key it is to the gameplay

Ask any FPS aficionado about the future of the genre, and the response is likely to namecheck the codeshops of Texas: id, Raven, 2015, Ritual, et al. Cheadle – a small town in the north of England – is unlikely to get a mention. As incongruous as it may sound though, it's at Warthog's Cheadle offices where EA is placing its money – having spotted the potential of this part FPS/part space shooter. The creators are no strangers to the space sim, having delivered the sophisticated *Starlancer* for Digital Anvil, as well as Activision's *Star Trek: Invasion*. But sans licence and franchise,and following discussions with LucasArts which preclude it from placing a colon in the title, the team is hoping that its main innovation: the seamless transition between typical FPS-style foot-slogging and space-based blasting, will turn gamers' heads.

It's an impressive feat, but one which appears to be the game's only novelty. Until it's clear how the rest of the game works around it, *Mace Griffin* is in danger of becoming a one-trick pony. Granted, both enemy AI and the inevitable arsenal of weaponry were yet to be implemented in the pre-alpha that **Edge** saw, but with Xbox owners already au fait with an inspired genre offering (Bungie's *Halo*), *Mace Griffin* may struggle to make an impression.

Beach Spikers

Format: GameCu
Publisher: Se
Developer: Sega-AM
Origin: Japa
Release: Summ

Sun, sand, and spikes: Sega's ballistic beach volleyball-based arcade game is heading to GameCube, and may provide more incentive than most to don that skimpy bikini





While beach volleyball's televisual appeal mainly relies on its participants, it's to be hoped Sega's recreation of the sport excites in a different way

Forsaking its arcade sweetheart, Naomi 2, Sega-AM2 is set to make its first appearance on the GameCube. Since *Beach Spikers* is beach volleyball, a dynamic, skimpier alternative to the hard-court indoor version, the control system is simplistic to suit, using only the analogue stick and two buttons – one for passing, and one for shooting. A circular mark appears on the court at the spot where the ball is supposed to land, and keeping it in the air is as simple as moving across and pressing a button. According to the button and the situation, your twoperson team will carry out defensive recoveries, set-ups or spikes.

While the control system is simple, it's possible to develop strategies and new techniques – for example, faking to shoot, and so on – and a power meter lets players gauge the power of each action. Multiplayer, which lets four players play at once, is one of the game's obvious draws. Arcade mode creates a simple tournament of 16 teams; World Tour lets you create your own team and participate in championships; and an AI mode has you training the computer via between-set pep talks. Choosing the tone of voice your character takes will either result in stronger team play or a mutual hatred growing in proportion to your biting comments.



It's up to you to manage your team as effectivel as possible, measured by a teamwork gauge. Detail fetishists will be pleased that hair colour and bikini stylings are completely configurable

Republic: The Revolution

Format: PC
Publisher: Eido
Developer: Elixir Studio
Origin: UK
Release: Q

Previously in E78, E86, E9

A low-profile demo day at Elixir's North London studio gave Edge a chance to see Republic's impressive graphics engine rendering fake-Soviet cities in realtime

Three years down, and Elixir enters its drawn-out crunch time. The team has finally finished working on *Republic*'s engine, and, while superficially it isn't spectacular, mathematically it's excellent, polygon models breaking and reforming almost seamlessly. Clever, but the game is **Edge**'s main concern, and that's what the remaining six months of development time will focus on. No longer a battle between 16 autonomous gangs, Hassibis' new *Republic* has the player progressing through a story-led campaign and the ranks of Eastern European politics.

The focus of the game is recruitment. Recruits are won through executing combinations of scripted events, violent or passive. Players can sway these events within certain parameters, by increasing the violence or playing down the level of intimidation. They can also communicate with potential recruits via a symbol-based method of communication, something Hassibis says evolved from the visitors' thought bubbles in *Theme Park*. *Republic*'s setting, combined with an impressive score and range of ambient effects means that, atmospherically at least, Elixir's cold, barren townscape is potentially without rival. The lack of visible content, though, means any other judgements remain on hold.



While onscreen action is sparse at the moment, it's still possible to track buses and inhabitants around the city as they keep to their daily routine







The engine is impressive, rendering individual leaves and popping them in and out of existence as the number of polygons changes





Ghost Master

It has paranormal investigators, spirits with awful smells and a pumpkin-headed character who can vomit crows. Ghost Master is not your usual videogame, then. Edge calls Oxford-based Sick Puppies to investigate…

There's an issue that needs to be addressed before the first playable code of *Ghost Master* is even shown to **Edge**. Not that **Gregg Barnett**, creative director of Sick Puppies (and developer of the seminal *The Way of the Exploding Fist*) really cares about the obvious comparison. "It's hard to classify a category for *Ghost Master*," he says matter-of-factly. "People will say that it's like *The Sims*, but that you scare people. It's not a resource management game or a god sim – it has each of these elements, but *Ghost Master* was designed before *The Sims*."

Lazy comparisons between Maxis' all-conquering game and *Ghost Master* are bound to occur, but for Barnett the affinity is actually a benefit. Two or three years ago *Ghost Master* might have been a little too left-field for most publishers, but now such titles are embraced and the public can easily understand the principles that underpin the gameplay. In its purest form, *Ghost Master* is simplicity itself: it allows you to scare the bejesus out of people. Not a bad premise for a game.

In essence the player takes the role of an otherworldly civil servant with just a handful of ghosts to deploy down on Earth. From a hub-world, scenarios can be selected. These include The Blair Wisp Project, Deadfellas, Spooky Hollow, Field of Nightmares and Weird Seance. Clearly, Barnett is not afraid of a pun or three, but the irreverence does hint at the light-hearted tone that infuses the whole project. The last thing Sick Puppies wants is a stodgy point-and-click PC game which only appeals to a niche market. With this in mind, everything is being geared towards a simple interface (gamepads are recommended) with a move on to both PS2 and Xbox planned.

The most impressive aspect of *Ghost Master* is the variety of scenarios on offer. Combine this with the sheer number of effects and powers which can be used to complete goals and repetition is unlikely to be a problem. Early code already displays an organic nature to the gameplay. Take your ghosts into Calamityville Horror and you will find a house full of residents to spook. However, the goal is more challenging than merely frightening them out of

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Empire Interactive**
Developer: **Sick Puppies**
Release: **Q4 (PC), Spring 2003 (PS2, Xbox)**
Origin: **UK**





Sick Puppies wants the player to control the camera with a standard joypad. Ease of use is a priority and when a key event is taking place an indicator alerts the player. A quick button press sends the camera to the point of interest

Ghostly powers

Name: Scarecrow
Family: Disturbances
Type: Horde
Fetter: Outside

Hordes are fairly unintelligent spirits to which swarming animals or insects are attracted. Scarecrow can unleash a murder of crows from his gaping maw.



Name: Moonscream
Family: Frighteners
Type: Banshee
Fetter: Window, thoroughfare

These restless spirits of cursed women are not as powerful as a spectre, but can roam further afield and can be highly effective for their upkeep. Their noise powers can really help build up a spooky atmosphere.



Name: Blair Wisp
Family: Reflections
Type: Wisp
Fetter: Outside

The notorious wil-o-the-wisps traditionally inhabit swamps where light can lure people to their doom. However, in these modern times, Wisp traditions are changing and they will haunt most outside locations – providing there is the possibility of luring someone towards an unpleasant fate.



Name: Ghastly
Family: Frighteners
Type: Spectre
Fetter: Site of violent event

Spectres form the basis of all good hauntings – and once they grow into wraiths they can become very powerful. Ghastly has a terrible habit of splitting himself in half with his sickle hands.



Name: Cogjammer
Family: Disturbances
Type: Gremlin
Fetter: Electrical, mechanical

These mischievous spirits of animals killed by machinery have the advantage of being cheap to maintain and still reasonably effective at scaring the impressionable. Can be devastating in any kitchen environment.



Name: Shivers
Family: Disturbances
Type: Phantom
Fetter: Site of emotional event

Although not as adept at causing fear as their visible cousins, the Frighteners, a phantom can cause more subtle effects by haunting the sites where emotional events have taken place.



the building. It transpires that the previous owner was a mad old dear who poisoned visitors and buried the bodies in the building. The player must find the trapped spirits of three ghosts and 'lay them to rest' – a procedure that puts them on to the gamer's roster to use later.

ArcLight, the spirit of a boiler maintenance man, for instance, can be liberated from behind a brick wall in the cellar. Ghostly leaks can be sprung in the wall, telekinetic powers used on nearby objects or Banshees placed to screech and attract the attention of residents. The behaviour of the character investigating the disturbance will also differ wildly. A child may run away screaming, a mother might call out a plumber and the father may try to break the wall down himself.

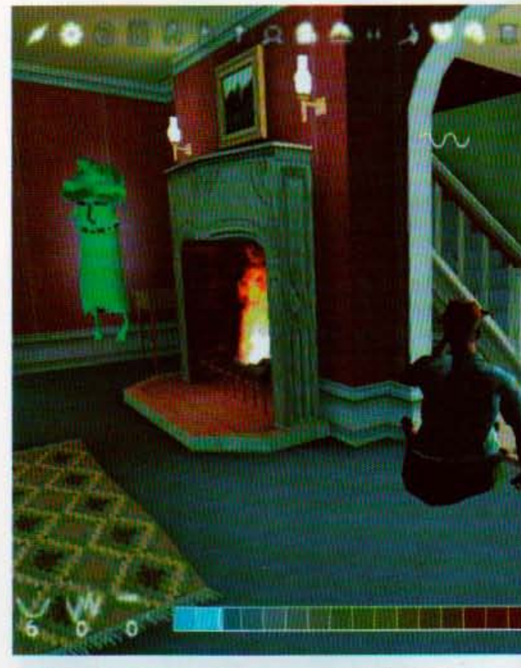
Telekinetic powers

"We've tried to accept all emergent behaviour while playtesting and then trap it to use it again," states Barnett. "So a ghost could use its telekinetic powers on some gym dumbbells and start throwing them around. This could then break things open. On one level we had a gun and we just thought, 'Why don't we have it so that if a character sees a ghost through a window he will shoot the gun and break it?' There are at least three known solutions to any given sub-goal."

Some 60 playable ghosts boasting 200 effects will make the final game, though a maximum of eight can be taken to participate in any given scenario. Ghosts can be 'fettered' to locations which draw upon their particular power. There are 16 fetters in the game represented by a series of icons on the display. Gremlins can be fettered to mechanical objects and spectres to sites where violent events have occurred.

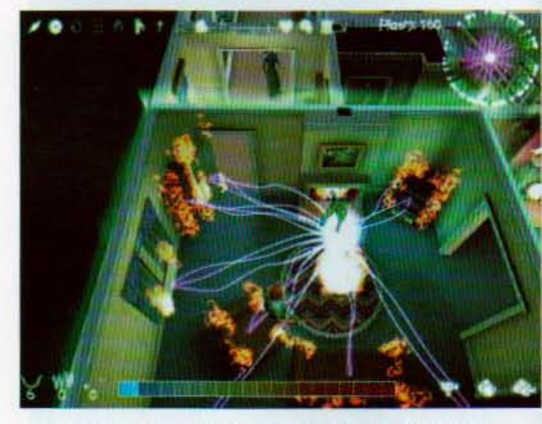
The ghosts fit into certain families: Elementals, Reflections, Frighteners and Disturbances. Broadly speaking, Frighteners consist of ghosts such as Spooks, Wights, Spectres and Banshees. Clearly their skills focus on terrifying the wits out of humans with a number of freakish abilities. Ghosts in the Disturbances family are a little more esoteric and consist of Phantoms, Poltergeists, Gremlins, Hordes and Whisperers. These spirits have the ability to possess physical objects and can then harass and startle the living.

One resource, plasm, plays an integral role in the game. The more the living are terrorised the higher the plasm level goes. Plasm can then be used to



Ghosts from the Frighteners family can use noise to terrify residents. Humans emit a garbled cartoon language which indicates their level of ter

"We've tried to accept all emergent behaviour while playtesting and then trap it to use it again. There are at least three known solutions to any given sub-goal"



Lightning effects devastate local residents and their surroundings. Anyone in the vicinity is suitably spooked, raising the plasm



'buy' extra skills for your motley band of ghosts, and some will eventually transform into super ghosts with enhanced abilities. The Sandman, for instance, can affect the dreams of the living but will later transform into a much more powerful Nightmare.

A simple method of raising plasm would be to place a gremlin in a microwave ready for an unsuspecting character to arrive in the kitchen and trigger a number of electrical effects. Later, in an underwater level, the player must retrieve objects from a sunken galleon. But even the telekinetic ghosts cannot pull objects directly from the water. The task requires some lateral thought and the manipulation of the divers searching the wreckage. Certainly, the combinations available are impressive and the visual effects the ghostly powers have on the humans can be both dramatic and amusing.

Cannon-fodder

"The people are the cannon-fodder in the game," explains Barnett. "It's relatively simple to scare one of them, but to complete sub-goals is a little more difficult. You will have to influence the residents to overcome certain situations. We have it so you can go into the heads of the human characters which adds another perspective and increases player involvement."

The resulting panic can also be viewed from one of three special ghost cams. Cleverly, these ghostly cameramen use techniques associated with particular genres or directors: a Romero-style B-movie effect, an amateur 'Blair Witch' style, complete with shaky handcam shots, while the spectral director, Hunchcock delivers classic Hitchcockian angles and pans. It's an addition which underlines the 'sandbox' nature of the gameplay where everything can be tried on everything.

Structurally the game is split into three acts and Barnett promises a strong plot to link each segment together. Simple scare tactics can see the player through early levels but the introduction of paranormal investigators and ghost 'breakers' in the second act will ramp up the challenge ensuring that the player uses the ghostly powers at his disposal with more intelligence and imagination. The final act remains under wraps but the team promises an opportunity to enter a police station to free previously captured ghosts from containment cells for a big finale.

Barnett isn't hiding the fact that he'd like to produce a number of *Sims*-style expansions, should the game prove successful. Certainly, present evidence suggests that the game is capable of creeping into thousands of homes across the world. But whether it quite possesses the power to take over middle America is another matter entirely.



The game's ultimate success will depend on the variety of response displayed by the living. More work needs to be done in this area









One of Ghastly's more pungent powers is his ability to stink a room out. Although the area of effect is slightly limited, anyone entering the location will be immediately repulsed to the point where they may want to flee the house entirely. All the ghostly powers are 'fettered' to particular points. So, electricity powers, for instance, can be attached to kitchen appliances


EDGE AWARDS
2002

Edge Awards

Since the last Edge awards the industry has gone from gloom to boom, delivering a rare ten out of ten game and an even rarer (for Edge) one out of ten turkey. Mixed fortunes for publishers, perhaps, but you have been treated to some vintage electronic entertainment

The **Edge** Awards don't get any easier to judge. The industry expands year-on-year and the number of titles released by publishers just gets greater. Of course, for every *Halo* there's a hundred *Red Factions*, but at least **Edge**'s quest to bring you the best, most interesting – and sometimes – most hyped titles, weeds out the *Shadow of Zorros* of the world.

The decision to increase the coverage from last year (double the pagination of **E**97) reflects this trend, but is also in response to the tremendous feedback the awards received from the industry at large, especially in Japan. While some of the decisions took a few moments, most demanded a degree of head-scratching, contemplative debate and outright feuding. Although the review of the year highlights many of the difficulties the industry faced over 2001–2002, this is a celebration of gaming. So sit back and enjoy an overview of 12 months that brought us some of the most original and absorbing videogame content ever conceived.



Take another look at the review pages from **Edge**'s January issue (**E**105). Things just went crazy. *Halo* scoring ten out of ten is one thing, but two nines, eight eights and five sevens made it **Edge**'s highest scoring issue of all time. And while *Fusion Frenzy* may have spoiled the party somewhat, the issue underlined the sheer strength and depth of software released since the last awards were held.

The reason is simple: after a sluggish start the PlayStation2 began to reach maturity and is already the elder statesman of the current generation of hardware. After many growing pains, developers are finally mastering its demanding architecture, and producing both esoteric and absorbing titles as a result. But the launch of GameCube, Xbox and Game Boy Advance was even more significant, truly heralding in a new era of gaming and making 2001–2002 one of the most important periods in videogame history. Gamers have never had it so good.

But before the celebrations become too overblown it seems appropriate to point out a few of the year's more melancholic moments. Precocious new hardware inevitably replaces veteran platforms and it was with some heartache that **Edge** finally stripped the 'Dreamcast' label from its front cover banner. At least the majestic *Phantasy Star Online* provided a poignant swansong for the format. But Sega fans had reason to be cheerful: the company emerged from the aftermath restructured and resurgent and the first fruits of its labours have already begun to appear on other platforms. *Virtua Tennis* on PC, *Super Monkey Ball* on GameCube, *Jet Set Radio Future* on Xbox, *Rez* on PS2 (and DC) – even Sonic has made his way to the Game Boy Advance. Unthinkable just two years ago.

A difficult trading period saw other companies feeling the squeeze. Notably, Square, whose financial model has always veered towards the ambitious. Big budget games require big profit turnovers – which never really surfaced. 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within' cost the company $100m to make. It grossed $35m at the US box office. Square's plight mirrors that of many others, including Eidos, Acclaim, Interplay and Rage. All have different stories, but a slow start to 2002, influenced by a slow take-up of PS2 hardware and software didn't help matters. And spare a thought for the teams which had a project canned in the last 12 months. The anguish of Origin, who after over two years of development, had *Ultima Worlds Online* pulled by EA embody them all. A funeral pyre was built to commit all trace of the game back to the atmosphere.

But to the games. The following ten pages highlight the greatest videogames of the last year, but there were plenty which just missed out on a runners-up place. The Game Boy Advance, in particular, hosted some of the most accessible and rewarding games on any platform. *Mario Kart Advance*, *Minna De Puyo Puyo*, *Super Mario Advance 2* and the magnificent *Advance Wars* narrowly missed out in key categories. The PC, too, delivered two of the most absorbing games of the year in *Operation Flashpoint* and *Civilization III*, and richly deserve an honourable mention.

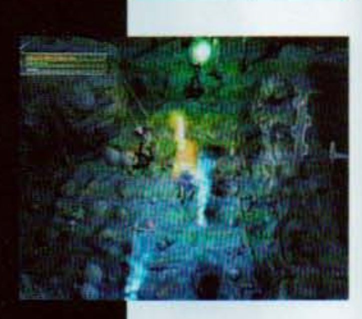
One of the most addictive games of the past 12 months, *Winning Eleven 5*, warrants approbation in spades. It has delivered many a dramatic moment in the **Edge** office and has lost none of its shine since its early review in **E**98. Other exceptional PS2 titles include the beautiful *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, the entertaining and sumptuous *Jak and Daxter* and the stylish *Devil May Cry*. And those with a penchant for rhythm action titles were well catered for with the inventive *Bravo Music* (featuring one of the most novel uses of the PS2 controller's analogue buttons) and *Frequency*.

But the two new kids on the block, Xbox and GameCube also provided plenty of titles for **Edge** to argue over. The imagination evident in both *Luigi's Mansion* and *Pikmin* was captivating and proof that Nintendo's back to basics philosophy wasn't just hot air. But Xbox had three key titles which didn't quite make it into a runners-up slot. The polished *Project Gotham Racing*, the elegant *Jet Set Radio Future* and the tranquil and addictive *Amped* all merit an honourable mention.

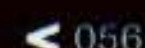
Turbulent, surprising, dramatic and exhilarating. It's been a wonderful ride. But can 2002–2003 really match up to the last 12 months in gaming? With Microsoft assiduously promoting the Xbox's broadband capabilities and Sony finally getting its online act together gamers may well be in for some rich massively multiplayer experiences. Hopefully developers and designers will meet the challenges set down by the three major hardware manufacturers. Have a great year, whatever your platform of choice may be.

and the 2002 winners are...











Game of the Year



first

For providing the most consistent gamespace, for the most effective integration of graphics, sound and game mechanics, but above all, for delivering the most enjoyable gaming experience of the year



Halo: Combat Evolved

Format: Xbox ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Bungie

Edge has pointed out the magnificence of *Halo* on many occasions, but skirted around some of the individual moments that make the game so special. But now that UK gamers have had the chance to sample the title for themselves it seems fitting to highlight just a couple of the touches which make *Halo* more comprehensive, breathtaking and just more fun than any firstperson shooter which has gone before. Warning: may contain (slight) spoilers.

Yes, the AI is exalted, the visuals imposing and the action both cerebral and thrilling, but it is the integration of vehicles in *Halo* which produces many of the game's standout moments. When a Covenant Banshee swoops down to attack the player, instinct provokes the flight or fight response. Nonchalantly discharging a weapon into the ship's hull produces the desired effect – smoke and damage. But vehicles in *Halo* do not just disappear in a lazy bitmapped explosion. Shoot down a Banshee and the wreckage is likely to plummet towards you, spilling debris over the ground, and finally crashing into the rock which you've just frantically run behind. Find a Banshee undamaged and you can take to the skies. It's not just a bolted-on flying section but a profoundly liberating design element. Surveying the towering architecture of the Covenant world from high above is simply awe-inspiring.

Chances are, if an alien can shoot at you from a certain location, you can reach it; if an alien can climb inside the cockpit of a vehicle, so can you. The game has been designed to free the player – to let you try things which would either be impossible or accompanied with a 'you have left the play area' message in any other game. Only extended play reveals some of the game's more brilliant touches, and make it worth the price of an Xbox alone. *Halo* works on so many levels and is simply on a different plane to any other title which has emerged in the last year.









In my opinion

John Howard, lead designer, Bungie

"Making videogames is like baking a gunpowder cake; sometimes you just hope you can get the damn thing out of the oven before it blows up your house. So it's somewhat startling and truly gratifying when people really enjoy it. From the entire *Halo* team: thanks for this great honour."

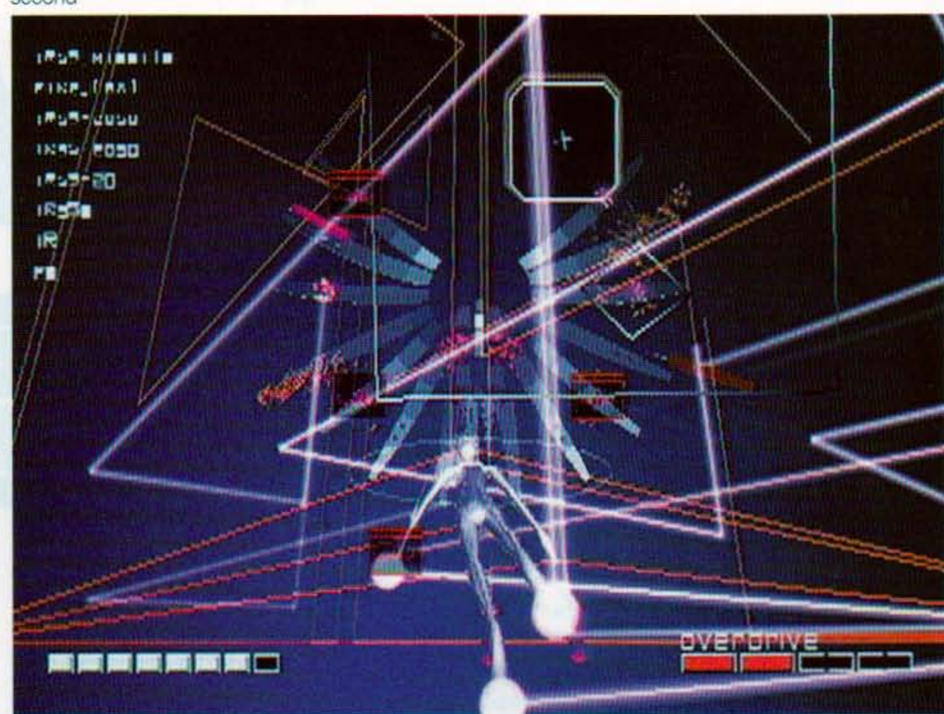
Edge awards

Rez

Format: PlayStation2, Dreamcast ■ Publisher: SCEE/Sega ■ Developer: UGA

The premise is simple – classic videogaming structure, in fact. Things move, you target and shoot them, avoid being hit yourself, collect power-ups, evolve your character and move on to the next stage. It's short, too: an average player should be able to clear the game in under an hour (you don't realise how substantial the replay value is, at first). So why is it one of the year's best videogaming experiences? Because it's a beautiful, defiant, ambitious, compelling, rewarding, sumptuously crafted piece of electronic entertainment. Because it's everything a game of its type should be, branching off typical genre classification to pave the way for more artistic creations that may, and should, follow. Because it's something everyone should try at least once, if only to realise the potential that exists within every videogame.

second



Super Monkey Ball

Format: GameCube ■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Amusement Vision

Tilt the maze, roll the monkey through the goal, and move on. Except you can't move on, because *Super Monkey Ball* doesn't let go: not then, not now, not ever. It's all in the difficulty curve, which tests the player to the very limit of their patience, but rarely frustrates. It is also in its level design which ranges from the deceivingly difficult to the bewilderingly impossible. It is, most of all, in its vector-perfect control system, which is tailored to the ridges of the GameCube's analogue stick and never, ever fails the player. *Super Monkey Ball* is always blameless. The sickening feeling of falling from a ledge is absolutely down to you; conversely, the euphoria of victory is entirely yours, also.

And that's just the singleplayer game, without considering Monkey Bowling, which offers so much subtlety and satisfaction that for months after the code came into the office, it continued to wound **Edge**'s ability to hit deadline. Or Monkey Flight, or Monkey Golf, or Monkey Billiards, or Monkey Boxing, or Monkey Racing, or just vanilla Monkey Ball in multiplayer. The design brief should serve as a beacon to developers fighting against arcane interfaces and structural complexity, but everyone else shouldn't be over-analysing the game's appeal. Regardless of your gaming motivation, there is so much fun to be had here and, six months after launch, it remains the essential GameCube title.

third



Other finalists

Advance Wars (GBA, E104)

Civilization III (PC, E105)

Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis (PC, E99)

Mario Kart Advance (GBA, E102)

Winning Eleven 5 (PS2, E98)

Publisher of the Year



Irrespective of commercial success, or the numerical superiority of its release schedule, Edge's Publisher of the Year has demonstrated an unmatched commitment to providing gamers with the widest catalogue of interesting and enjoyable videogames

Sega

In purely creative terms the past 12 months have witnessed an absolute vindication of Sega's decision to adopt a multiplatform publishing strategy. Indeed, given the death of the Dreamcast it's almost poignant that the launch of both Xbox and GameCube have benefited from Sega's expertise, particularly since *Super Monkey Ball* is still the finest title available on Nintendo's next-generation hardware, and *Jet Set Radio Future* currently stands above the broad mass of Xbox software.

And even though the rapidly maturing PlayStation2 has acquired a distinguished software library over the past year, UGA's *Rez* is still unsurpassed on the platform. But lest we forget, the year also saw a fitting swansong for Dreamcast, in the shape of titles as diverse as *Shenmue II*, *Phantasy Star Online Ver.2*, *Sonic Adventure 2*, and *Bass Fishing 2*. There is simply no other publisher with such a distinguished record of creative excellence.

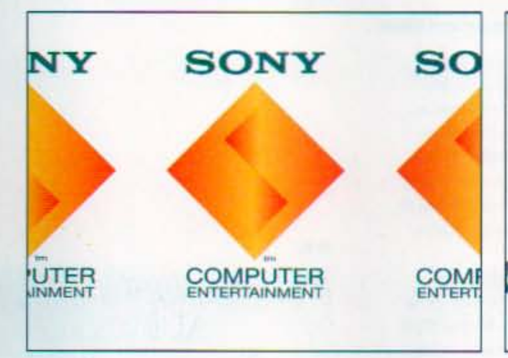
SCE

Anyone quick to dismiss Sony Computer Entertainment as videogaming's worst evil would perhaps benefit from taking a considered look at the publisher's (naturally format-centric) work over the past year. *Ico*, *Frequency*, *Jak and Daxter*, *GT3 A-spec*, *Dropship*, *WRC*, *Bravo Music*, *Dark Cloud*, *Extermination* have been supported by the likes of *Drakan*, *Airblade*, *Sky Gunner*, and *PaRappa the Rapper 2*. Even brave, but ultimately flawed, attempts such as *Ka* and *Ape Escape 2001* hold some merit, if only for attempting to bring different gaming experiences to the table. A brawny, diverse line-up of games that was certainly instrumental in pulling the PS2 out of its difficult first year.

Microsoft

This time last year, for Microsoft's mediocre PC catalogue to merit consideration for an award in publishing would be unthinkable. Now, but for a question mark over its quality control, it could have won it. *Amped*, *Dead or Alive 3*, and *Project Gotham Racing* are three shining lights in its line-up; *Azurik*, *Fuzion Frenzy*, and *Blood Wake* the clouds. The stunning *Halo*, though, proves the deciding factor. While PC and Mac owners might be bitter that Microsoft bought Bungie and snatched a large window of exclusivity for their masterwork, there's no question that it was an exceptionally smart decision, and one that probably worked in the game's favour.

first



second

third

In my opinion

Yusuke Suai, international department, Sega

"As Mr Katayama mentioned in his keynote address during the Tokyo Game Show last year, Sega's goal is to become the world number one in the consumer gaming sector, including network gaming. To meet this goal, Sega intends to use some of its most famous series like *Phantasy Star Online*. This is already in motion but we are also firmly committed to creating new experiences and providing the market with new and original content. Please enjoy our forthcoming line-up."

Other finalists

Capcom

Koei

Konami

Nintendo

Edge awards

Developer of the Year



With publisher conservatism at an all time high, the Developer of the Year award is a testament to both technical artistry and wilful creativity, rewarding those responsible for providing the broadest number of videogaming highs

first





second



third

Nintendo

To clear up any confusion, for this category Intelligent Systems, as a firstparty developer of the brilliant *Advance Wars* and *Mario Kart Advance*, is considered part of NCL's in-house talent (as is HAL Laboratories). And before you mention it, the same approach was applied to other finalists, including second placed Konami. And yet even without those two key titles, it's been a good year for Nintendo. Not its greatest, by any means – 128bit Mario and Link are missing, for a start – but the variety and consistency of its line-up were enough to earn it top place. Admittedly, *Super Mario Advance 2* is an update but this is hardly a reason to punish the developer for making one of the greatest videogaming experiences available to a new (and not so new) public. From **Edge**'s perspective both *Luigi's Mansion* and *Pikmin* thoroughly reinforce Nintendo's thirst for diversifying its productions, ensuring gamers are allowed access to a varied and wholesome videogaming diet that also includes a high carbohydrate, low-fibre option such as *WaveRace: Blue Storm*. This ability is usually only matched by Sega, though only in its publishing role for its various sub divisions – when taken as single companies, neither they nor any other developer has stood up to NCL's output this year.

Konami

Its development cycles might seem excessively sequential – *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Winning Eleven 5*, *Silent Scope 2*, *Silent Hill 2*, and new versions of its excellent *Bemani* range – but it's difficult to fault the quality of the games themselves, whatever their inspiration. *Winning Eleven* (taken, improved, and released over here as *Pro Evolution Soccer*) is the most perfect football simulation to date, the *Silent Hill* sequel was as artistically smart as it was terrifying, and *MGS2*, despite criticisms of stop-start flow and over-reliance on cut-scenes, retains the moments of outstanding creativity that made the original such a joy.

UGA

Other developers might have had a more sizeable portfolio, or a more commercially successful one. But while other developers proved willing to rely on boring, bankable, concepts and genres, Tetsuya Mizuguchi's United Game Artists bucked the trend for publisher-inspired conservatism and released a breath of inspirationally fresh air. Both *Rez* and *Space Channel 5 Part 2* defy easy categorisation. The act of developing such titles in the face of indomitable commercial realities is a touching gesture of defiance. But more importantly it's a stirring act of trust; trust in the people who buy games to recognise such a wilful act of creative enterprise when they see it.

Other finalists

Bungie

Capcom

Koei

Sonic Team

Sony Computer Entertainment Japan

In my opinion

David Gosen, managing director of sales and marketing, Nintendo of Europe

"We are delighted to be nominated for this award. As a pioneer of the games industry, Nintendo has always focused on innovative gameplay to generate the best possible gaming experience for players. Globally, Nintendo has sold over 1.4 billion games and with the launch of Nintendo GameCube, players can expect to be entertained, intrigued and surprised all over again by our latest portfolio of titles."

Innovation of the Year



Who said innovation was dead? The past 12 months have seen several developers exploring and contesting the boundaries of existing gameplay structures, through experimentation with interface design and the innovative use of input hardware, and by tinkering with established mechanics

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty

Format: PlayStation2 ■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: In-house

There is no single innovative element in *Metal Gear Solid 2* which makes it stand above other nominees, it's more a litany of touches which make it very special. The detail throughout is exceptional, every function of the DualShock2 exploited. Raiden is given the opportunity to use a range of weapons and gadgets, and nearly all produce varied effects depending on the context: cigarettes calm nerves and highlight infrared beams; chaff can disable cameras but also the radios of guards; and C4 can be placed in the most uncompromising of positions.

The guards themselves are not mere fodder to be nonchalantly dispatched but display a variety of behaviours. Whether prone, dizzy, alert or suspicious their reactions add a depth and subtlety to the gameplay which goes beyond tired AI routines. Enemies can be used as human shields, be decoyed by adult magazines and even dragged over to doorways to enter a retina scan.

Hideo Kojima has also injected a degree of self-referential material into the game that could keep postmodernist critics happy for years. The intertextual touches evident towards the end of the game are both amusing and show a profundity which even the plot can't harm. Exceptional stuff.

Ico

Format: PlayStation2 ■ Publisher: SCEE ■ Developer: SCEI

Climbing ledges and pulling switches is nothing new, but *Ico*'s quiet, minimalist philosophy and game direction improves the exploration dynamic no end. The left analogue stick controls the lead character, while the right one can point the fixed position cameras in any direction the player chooses, lending a filmic feel to the thirdperson adventure. This is compounded by the lack of any interface distractions; there are no health bars or any other traditionally accepted videogame clichés to spoil *Ico*'s illusion. The stark method of storytelling, too – almost entirely visual, boldly relying on the unspoken relationship between the lead characters – also impresses.

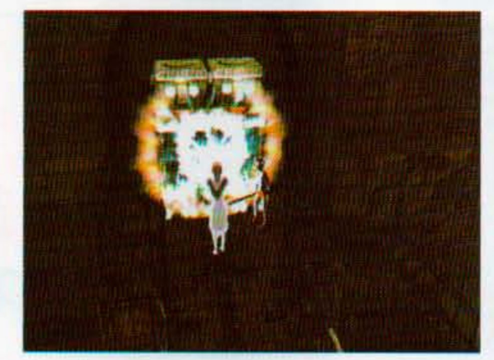
Rez

Format: PlayStation2, Dreamcast ■ Publisher: SCEE/Sega ■ Developer: UGA

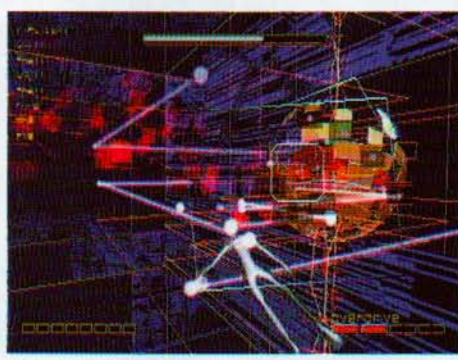
Some might see it as nothing more than *Panzer Dragoon* played on a Vectrex with some fast overlay swapping, but **Edge** would ask them to submit wholly to its principles of sound/light interplay, and understand just how deep the addiction can run. It's that interplay – the ability to interact with both the music and the visuals, and to see, hear and feel them all dance to your actions – that makes Mizuguchi-san's brave vision so special. It's possible that the doubters might not class the attempt at onscreen replication synaesthesia as innovation, but **Edge** can't think of many videogames that taste more of The New.

first





second



third

Other finalists

Bravo Music (PS2, E105)

Grand Theft Auto III (PS2, E105)

Project Eden (PS2, E103)

Super Monkey Ball (GC, E103)

In my opinion

Hideo Kojima, vice president, KCEJ

"Thank you for the Innovation of the Year award. Although *MGS2* is an orthodox sequel, I kept in mind the element of 'unexpectedness' in a good way. I did not want the game to be a simple enhanced PS2 version of the PlayStation game. I added to the good points of *MGS* a structure, gimmicks, and service that provide the consumer with a sense of freshness. It was a very bold adventure. That is why I am very happy about the Innovation of the Year award."

Edge awards

Graphical Achievement of the Year



Graphical Achievement isn't merely about technical expertise; it's about establishing a visual aesthetic that stands on its own merits, regardless of new gaming hardware

Rez

Format: PlayStation2, Dreamcast ■ Publisher: SCEE/Sega ■ Developer: UGA

It's almost a betrayal of Mizuguchi-san's unique vision to distinguish the visual component of *Rez* for separate comment. The inspired wireframe aesthetic is almost inextricably fused with the game's heady mix of instinctive action, bombastic soundtrack and evolution-themed narrative. But even considered alone, the distinctive appearance and extraordinary exploration of abstract space is more than just a technical achievement. It's a singular achievement that will survive intact in the face of any amount of hardware innovation and technological progress.

There's the sublime attention to peripheral detail; the monumental set pieces such as the gargantuan running man boss; the distinctive use of primary colours; and the transition to increasingly concrete level architecture. In short, the game's visual realisation is a vital facet in the overall transformative experience it provides. It sets a standard that, unfortunately, is all too likely to remain unchallenged for the foreseeable future.

Ico

Format: PlayStation2 ■ Publisher: SCEE ■ Developer: SCEI

From the pale and delicately defined form of Ico's companion Yorda, to the imaginative shadow fiends that hound her throughout the player's journey, every participant in SCEE's adventure proves equal parts bewitching and believable. But what really amazes isn't the models or animation of the inhabitants, but the construction and lighting of the castle they explore. Magnificent in design, epic in scale, and glorious in execution, visuals have rarely been so well mapped to the subject matter, and have never created as solid a structure or as lucid a fairytale.

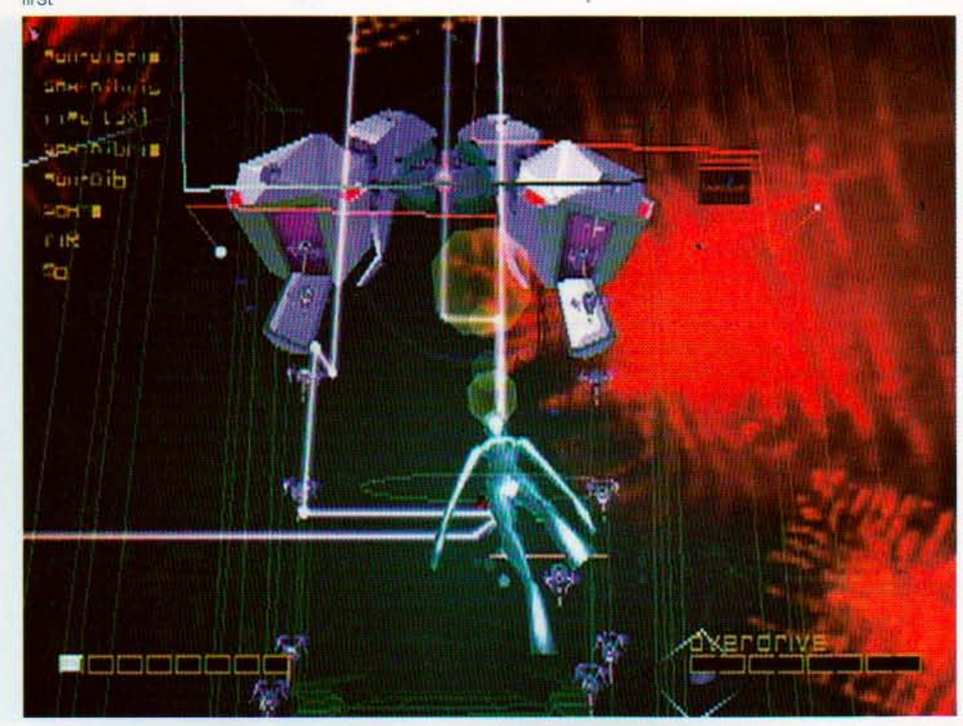
Jet Set Radio Future

Format: Xbox ■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Smilebit

Diametrically opposed to *Ico* on the subtlety scale, *Jet Set Radio Future*'s graffiti cool built on the foundations of last year's **Edge** Award winner by doing everything bigger, better, bolder – although not necessarily brighter. But if the stylistic green-sheen put some primary freaks off, the draw distance – drawing everything on screen, right to the horizon, and then some – should have been enough to pull the graphics whores back in. Skidding through a future Tokyo, knocking blackbirds and pedestrians flying, spinning and spraying and sparks flying as you grind; the eternal camera struggles are almost forgivable when they're portraying something this beautiful.



first





second



third

Other finalists

Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance (PS2, E105)

Halo: Combat Evolved (Xbox, E105)

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (PS2, E106)

Phantasy Star Online Ver.2 (DC, E108)

Super Monkey Ball (GC, E103)

In my opinion

Tetsuya Mizuguchi, president and CEO, United Game Artists

"The graphics in *Rez* are inspired by the surrealism of Russian artist Kandinsky. We tried to ask, 'What would Kandinsky have achieved with the level of technology available today?' *Rez* features a world inhabited by computers and humans, linked together via computer memory. The graphics are inspired by four ancient civilisations, and depicted in wireframes, which evolve with sound and light. This is what is so unique about *Rez*."

Technical Achievement of the Year



For putting the pedal to the metal and extracting every last ounce of technical capacity out of the current crop of gaming hardware, some developers are capable of delivering the most technically sophisticated instances of the medium

Halo: Combat Evolved

Format: Xbox ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Bungie

Although it's difficult to assess just how much *Halo* is squeezing out of the Xbox, the game's all-round level of detail and polish is exceptional. In terms of pure coding prowess *Halo* can hardly be faulted. The amount of work that has gone into the AI alone – which is at all times both consistent and adroit – is enough to win it many plaudits. But it's not just the behaviour of the enemies which puts *Halo* into the top spot, the intelligent implementation of squad-based AI, manifest in your marine compatriots, gives the action an epic quality missing from other games in the same genre.

But the sheer scale of the environments impresses, too. Monumental architecture and extensive landscapes awash with rich textures reflect a first-rate understanding of the host hardware. But the *Halo* world is also a highly functional one full of vehicles which can be commandeered to help overcome hordes of enemies. Loading times are also unobtrusive, further helping to maintain the world's spell over the player for long periods. Technically, *Halo* displays a level of rigour and finesse sadly missing from many modern videogames.

Shenmue II

Format: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sega-AM2

Shenmue on Dreamcast was an exceptional feat of coding which has, incredibly, been improved upon by some margin in the sequel. Where the first offered a handful of characters to interact with, the second delivers a cast of hundreds; where the first offered small villages, the second delivers whole cities. From Hong Kong to Guilin, the intricate network of streets and buildings is breathtaking.

The possibilities for exploration are seemingly limitless – whether it be searching for gambling opportunities or entering an arcade to play *OutRun*. One of the most beautifully realised videogame worlds ever consigned to silicon.

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty

Format: PlayStation2 ■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: In-house

There is a tendency to take the technological aspect of games for granted and while it's pleasing to note such a movement (technology should be invisible, after all), it's also important to realise what a developer has achieved. Yes, Konami probably had every company member working on *MGS2* at one point or another but, as anyone that witnessed the original *MGS2* trailer at E3 2000 will tell you, this still doesn't detract from the title's remarkable graphical quality. The attention to detail is extraordinary and the clinical aesthetic suits the game well to not only produce an entirely credible environment but also set the current benchmark for PS2 software.

Other finalists

Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance (PS2, E105)

Grand Theft Auto III (PS2, E105)

Jak and Daxter (PS2, E105)

first





second



third

In my opinion

Michael Evans, lead programmer, Bungie

"Working on *Halo* was an amazing experience. The bar set by the Chicago engineering team of Matt Segur, Charlie Gough and Jason Jones was amazingly high. It was really rewarding working on a project where you had to stretch to reach the level of what everyone else was doing. Thank you for recognising the team's hard work."

Edge awards

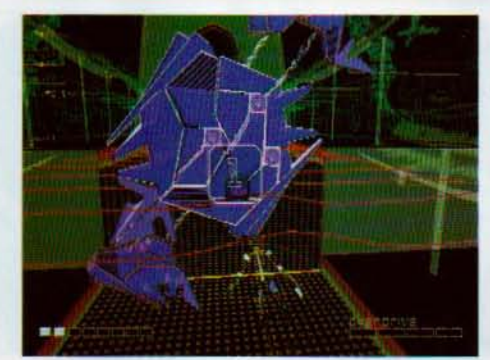
Audio Achievement of the Year



The Audio Achievement award is given to the videogame that boasts the highest quality soundtrack and effects, and the most effective integration of these with the core game mechanics

first





second



third

Halo: Combat Evolved

Format: Xbox ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Bungie

From the lofty orchestral score to the blazing plasma effects of the weapons, the audio in *Halo* is enthralling. Importantly, game music should never feel intrusive, but draw the player and provide dramatic counterpoints to the action. *Halo* does this at every turn and when the chilling choral strands build, one on top of another, to reflect the scale of the environments and the player's task at hand, it cannot fail but give an emotional impact missing from most modern games.

However, the Audio Achievement award doesn't go to *Halo* for the score alone, for in providing literally thousands of voice recordings for the marines, Bungie has managed to convey the sense of epic battles taking place better than any game before. The sound effects of weapons, too, are satisfyingly meaty always adding an edge to any combat. It's all enhanced by the realtime Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound capabilities of Xbox (one of the first console games to include this). Plug in, sit back, and be absorbed by a singularly superb aural experience.

Rez

Format: PlayStation2, Dreamcast ■ Publisher: SCEE/Sega ■ Developer: UGA

Mizuguchi-san's fondness for techno/trance tunes might not be to everyone's taste. But even so, a track listing that includes the likes of Ken Ishii, Adam Freeland and Japanese combo Joujouka, transcends the ordinary boundaries of musical tastes. Particularly because it's both appropriate to the game's visual aesthetic and instinctual action, but also because it's so seamlessly integrated into the game's delectable synaesthetic melange. Tracks such as 'Fear' and 'Realize' provide a fitting conclusion to the game's evolutionary trajectory, but it's the precision with which these are incorporated into the hypnotic, rhythmic, shoot 'em up dynamic that sets *Rez* and its soundtrack apart.

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty

Format: PlayStation2 ■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: In-house

Rhythm action titles aside, game music rarely gets a mention these days. More often than not, you know what you're going to get – ludicrously inappropriate dance beats in racing games, punk rock for extreme sports, and so on – yet it's only when a title utilises the medium properly that you realise just how persuasive the resulting effect can be. Employing Hollywood composer Harry Gregson-Williams and sampling all of the objects featured in *MGS2* can't have been cheap or much fun but Konami has to be pleased with the outcome. It's not just that the soundtrack is technically so far ahead of the majority of the last year's releases – it's the way it integrates itself so appropriately, so convincingly into the game.

Other finalists

Bravo Music (PS2, E105)

Frequency (PS2, E107)

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (PC, E107)

In my opinion

Marty O'Donnel, lead sound producer, Bungie

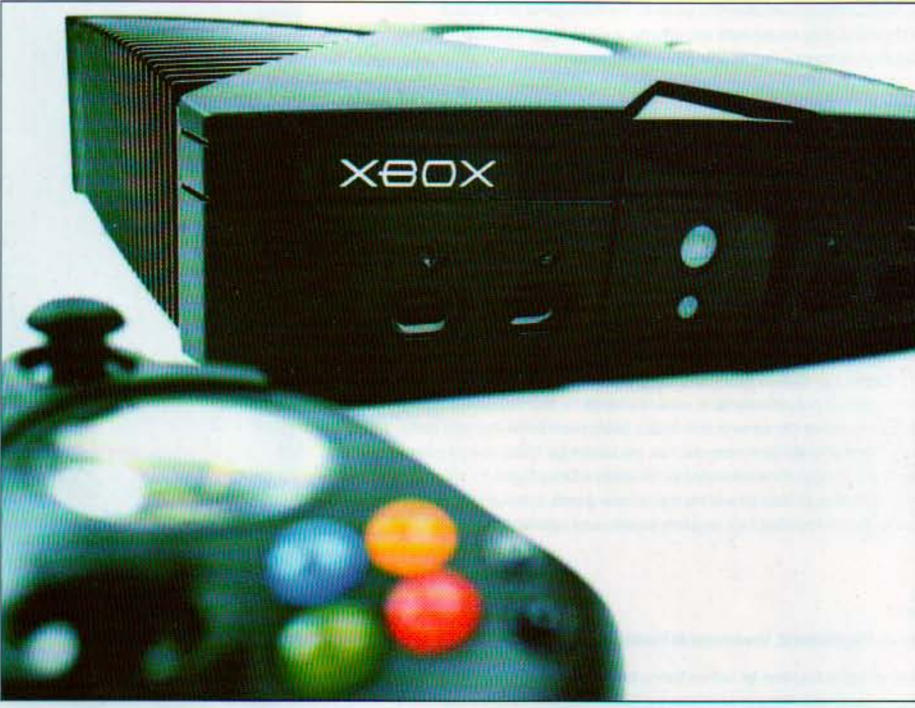
"Producing the audio for a project the size of *Halo* takes a huge collaborative effort. Everyone at Bungie really cares about audio but in particular I'd like to thank Jay Weinland, my right hand man on sound design, and Matt Segur, our tireless audio programmer, who both contributed greatly. I'd also like to thank my wife and children who supported and encouraged me through all the final months of production."

Hardware Innovation of the Year



For providing the most sophisticated or interesting technological platform with which to explore or enhance the possibilities of the videogame medium, competition for this year's Hardware Innovation award has been intense

first





second



third

Xbox

If this award was about console aesthetics then in all likelihood the Xbox wouldn't even be in the running. Its chunky design is, well, ugly and Japanese consumers are still having problems coming to terms with the sheer bulk of the machine. But underneath the thick-ribbed casing hides an inner strength which enables developers to simply do more than PS2 and GameCube can muster. No – hardware innovation is not just about pushing polys, but it's already becoming apparent that the GameCube is struggling to keep up (limited memory card capacity and a 1.5Gb storage medium has already resulted in *Biohazard* coming on two disks).

But it's not just raw performance that edges the Xbox ahead of Nintendo's admittedly cuter machine. The inclusion of an 8Gb hard drive and broadband functionality has sent a positive message out to the industry (27 publishers already have Xbox online titles on the books). In real terms, it means that the Xbox has the potential to deliver richer game experiences with an online component. Whether GameCube and PS2 owners are willing to shell out again on expensive add-ons remains to be seen. This award is for potential, and in two years' time, when the PS2 and GameCube are appearing increasingly weedy, the Xbox is likely to still be holding its own.

GameCube

It was close. But ultimately, GameCube slots in behind the Xbox. The design, the dimensions, the GBA interaction are typically great NCL touches. The quality and variety of subsequent software isn't necessarily in question. Yet, already recent Japanese GC releases have come bundled with a memory card and the arrival of *Biohazard* on two discs (see above) so early in the machine's life has created a little concern over the long term. In addition, while easily the most ergonomic of the current generation, the GC joypad can become unreasonably fussy when it comes to certain non-Miyamoto titles (already a problem evident in the N64 pad) – **Edge** played GC *Burnout* not too long ago and was surprised at how awkward the experience felt, largely thanks to Nintendo's tight button-assignment guidelines.

Backlight

Great inventions are often born from circumstance and necessity, and Adam Curtis' Game Boy Advance internal light is one of those. Requiring the buyer to completely invalidate their warranty and add some strip LED lighting to either side of the screen, the Afterburner light reduces battery life to nine hours, but carries the advantage of allowing handheld gamers to play games in something less than direct sunlight. Indeed, the kit works in pitch-black conditions, and has proved so effective and popular that Nintendo are rumoured to be bringing their own, pre-installed version in a GBA v2.0.

Other finalists

GeForce4 (nVidia)

In my opinion

Richard Taversham, UK head of marketing, Microsoft

"This is a great accolade for Xbox and we are delighted that **Edge** has recognised the innovation inherent in the console. The Xbox was designed to remove hardware barriers to the creative minds of games developers, and to add new dimensions to gameplay. This has already been seen in the launch line-up, and will be even more evident in the next releases. Thanks again, **Edge**."

The Wedges

Sometimes there are awards that just don't fit into neat categories. In the past these have been ignored, but not this year. Here, then, are some of the other highlights, and lowlights, of an eventful 12 months in videogaming













Biggest Disappointment of the Year

Red Faction

The mediocrity of *Red Faction* might not have been such a sizeable disappointment were it not for the fact that, in the months leading up to its release, it was so cunningly oversold. The Geo-Mod engine, it was alleged (with demo code as supporting evidence), was going to transform a moribund genre. In reality it wasn't enough to make up for slapdash design and a number of rudimentary development errors.

Worst Press Release of the Year

Peter Noble

"It's Official: Rock 'n' roll is a Dangerous Game," began Peter Noble's ham-fisted email promoting a tedious music management simulation. "So today you probably heard about the untimely death of the drummer of rock group Feeder," it continued, before clumsily staggering through a list of other recent rock suicides, labelling them "an ironic twist" in the advent of the game's release. Industry disgust snowballed; a grovelling apology email appeared in recipients' inboxes within 24 hours.

Vapourware Award for not appearing

The Getaway

Although there are a number of contenders for this award, (such as Confounding Factor's *Galleon* and ex-**Edge** diarists Elixir for *Republic*), SCEE's *The Getaway* just made it ahead of its competitors. Whether it will ever make it onto release schedules is another question, but with the beta phase of development now underway, it may yet come out in time for next year's **Edge** Awards.

Best Press Release of the Year

Simon Byron

A 250-word letter accompanying review code for *The Art of Magic*, Simon Byron's heartfelt meandering around the game's title had **Edge** applauding his word science. An extract: "I thought that David Blaine had discovered the art of magic – especially when I saw pictures of his girlfriend. Blaine's deceitful camera tricks and pathetic mysticism delivered in monotone were nothing more than modern-day fraud: but it was his ability to bag someone like her I admired. She must have worked out how it's done. She's left the loser now."

Best Mainstream Coverage of the Year

The Guide

With the closure of several technology supplements, 'The Guardian' holds the monopoly on balanced and fair coverage of videogames in the mainstream press. In particular, 'The Guide' supplement, on Saturdays, has demonstrated an unswerving commitment to judicious reviews and rational comment about the medium. Written by Nick Gillet, it's a small beacon of light in a seemingly uncaring media world.

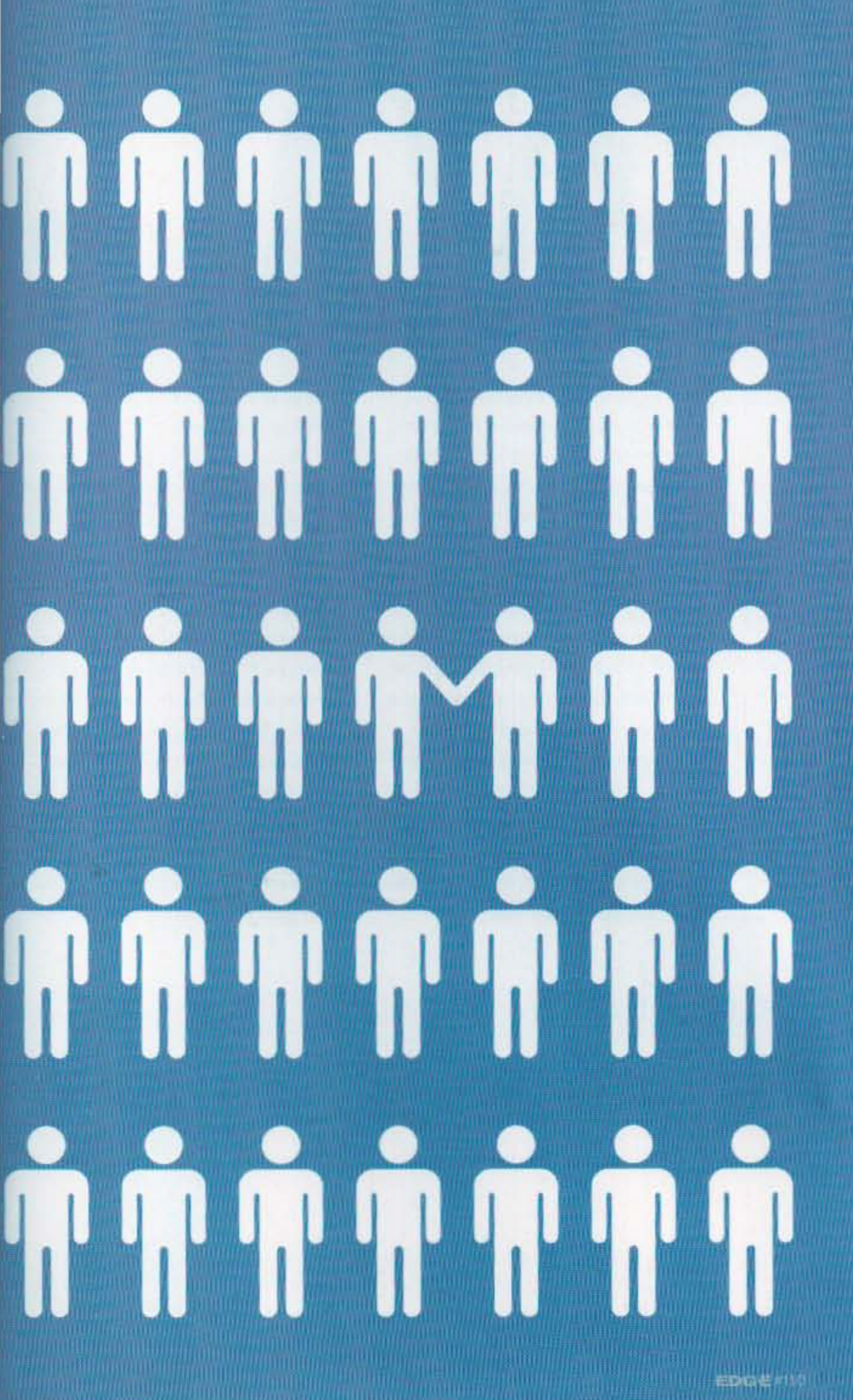
Surprise of the Year

Grand Theft Auto III

When **Edge** isn't supplied with review code, it's usually an indication of a game's quality. Take 2's alleged refusal to let anyone near *GTAIII* without an implicit guarantee of a high mark didn't bode well, either. But, come release day, it was clear that the game deserved more faith from its PR; it's a stunning coding achievement, and a faithful evolution of the original that managed to please newcomers and *GTA* purists alike.

Minority report

Recent research has highlighted the white, male and straight nature of videogame characters, but why is this the case and is the situation likely to change?



"I was working at this company and they were going to do a game called *Honky and Nigger*," discloses one developer when asked about racism in games. "When they told us this, I and around seven other people in the team said we would not let the company do it. They dropped it immediately after that because they knew if we went to the press and told them about this game it would kill them financially." At that point *Honky and Nigger* was canned, however, the fact that a company even considered releasing the game is shocking enough in itself. It may sound like a throwback to the days of *Custer's Revenge*, the notorious Atari VCS title in which the aim was to rape a native American woman tied to a pole, but this project was conceived and binned at a time when videogames are beginning to cross over to the mainstream.

While both *Custer's Revenge* and *Honky and Nigger* are extreme examples, a recent US study found that a heavy bias towards white game characters exists in the industry. The report, by the charity Children Now, trawled through the top ten selling games across the key games formats to assess how inclusive or exclusive they were in terms of both race and gender. The findings were not good news for an industry that makes a lot of fuss about generating more cash than Hollywood. The research indicates that you are more likely to get to play a non-human character than you are to play a woman, and in 73 per cent of cases you will be playing a man.

Further to this, half of the female characters that did appear in games were little more than props or bystanders with no particular role to play in the game's proceedings. Also, 52 per cent of male characters are white compared with 78 per cent for female characters. Thanks to several sports titles in the sample the figure is lower than it would otherwise have been.

"You are more likely to get to play a non-human character than you are to play a woman, and in 73 per cent of cases you will be playing a man"

"Videogames do seem to do worse than other mediums, particularly when it comes to the representation of women," says **Patti Miller**, director of Children Now's 'Children and the Media' programme. "And the lack of racial diversity in videogames seems to be on a similar level to that of TV." But some developers believe that small steps are being made. "About 15 years ago I was working on a game that got

canned for having a female lead character who wore a vest top and shorts similar to Lara Croft, rather than dressed in leather and holding a whip," notes Mucky Foot co-director **Gary Carr**. "So while *Tomb Raider* is not a particularly great victory for women it is at least a sign that the goal posts are widening."

However, the most damning finding of Children Now's research was the complete absence of non-white characters in games aimed at children and, according to one developer who used to work for one high profile children's games publisher, this is not necessarily accidental. "This publisher asked for black characters to be toned down or taken out of the products," explains the developer, who asked to remain anonymous. "Its reason was differences between markets across the world, mainly Japan. I was surprised by this but it thought it wouldn't go down well in Japan having black characters in its products."



Eidos took the decision to feature lesbian characters in *Fear Effect 2*, but unsubtle marketing exposed the real reasoning behind the move: to appeal to teenage fantasy

The colour of money

Despite this kind of whitewashing, the main reason for the lack of non-white characters is not deliberate racism according to **Shahid Ahmad**, managing director of Start Games. "It is not that they are consciously racist – it is not that at all," insists Ahmad, whose company funds developers with innovative game ideas. "If they could find a way of making money out of blacks or Asians, or whatever, they would do it. But they know if they work to a certain formula they are more likely to make money – it all boils down to numbers. Publishers do believe that games with black or Asian characters could lose them money although they won't openly say it." The influence of the US audience is a particularly important factor, believes Ahmad, who over the years has worked on numerous well-known games including *Jet Set Willy* and *Glover*. "The question is: what would middle America buy? Would they buy a game with a black leading character or an Asian leading character? No. They will buy fucking *Deer Hunter*, that is what they will buy. Those rednecks want to go out and shoot some animals. Having said that, if you do a game where 'Pakis' and 'niggers' are shot they'd probably buy eve[n] more of those in middle America."



Duke Nukem (centre) exemplifies the stereotypical videogame character, while Lara Croft (right) encouraged many digital wannabes. Darci Stern (left) remains a fine rarity: a black female character

At the development level, questions ov[er] who or what a character should be tend t[o] be pushed to one side to make way for coding and game idea concerns. "We do[n't] get together and say we're going to create a character. In my experience, projects an[d] characters are already defined and we jus[t] produce it," explains **Roger Mitchell**, a senior artist at Climax London who lists *Theme Park World* among his credits. "It i[s] not a question of ten people in a circle gathering around saying, 'This is going to happen', it is about what the publisher wants. Game design usually covers production values and technology." Carr agrees, "Developers tend not to be as

conscious of that side of things as much as publishers. Characters just come to mind and the decision on race or gender is not conscious. Our first game, *Urban Chaos*, was never focused on having a female black lead character, it was focused on the game idea."

Interestingly, this lack of focus on character can change drastically in later stages of development when the game starts getting the once over from focus groups set up by the publisher. These groups, which consist of various representatives of the publisher including marketing departments, can often influence which characters actually make it to the shop shelves. "Sometimes characters are examined and generally they want more stereotypes. If you put an unattractive or normal looking woman who isn't evil into the game, the feedback is usually to make them less scary or more attractive. Often these characters aren't even the central ones, they are just there as run-of-the-mill characters," adds Carr.

Balbir Blugan, business development manager at Kuju, believes much of this comes down to catering for the existing game-playing audience. "Most of the people in the US who buy games are white and people play games they relate to, so they find white characters more real and more like them," she argues. "It is even the case with the games coming out of Japan now. Their global idea of beauty is very much the European idea of beauty – a certain face shape, a certain nose shape. Even a lot of Japanese characters have very Eurasian features."

"The question is: what would middle America buy? Would they buy a game with a black leading character? No. They will buy fucking Deer Hunter"

It is not just female characters that are pushed into particular body shapes. To a lesser extent male game characters also receive the 'perfect body' treatment. Men are often drawn to resemble muscle-bound, six-packed body builder types while women are twisted into silicon-enhanced mirror-images of 'Daily Star' favourite Jordan. But female characters are most often sexualised says **Nikki Douglas**, founder of women gamers' site Grrlgamer.com. "Big burly male characters like Duke Nukem do fit into the Arnie stereotype for example, but then you do also get characters like Freeman from *Half-Life* who is your everyday kind of guy thrown into extraordinary circumstances."

Bridging the gender divide

Ever since the games industry realised it was missing out on cash from women it has been trying to discover the formula to persuade women to play games. And with the knowledge that the male-female spilt, when it comes to Web use, is 50-50 there is clearly a lucrative market out there. But while the likes of *Barbie Fashion Designer* do sell well they are pitched directly at the children's market and the task of bringing games to females over 12 has proven more difficult. Grrlgamer.com's Nikki Douglas believes the hunt for this mystical game is misguided in the first place. "They have tried for years to put together the gaming equivalent of a chick flick, but the whole essence of what makes a good game is universal."

Recently, several publishers have had success at producing games which appeal to women as much as men including Sega with *Space Channel 5*. "We know that there were substantially more female players than normal, almost 50 per cent and that's partly because it has a very fashionable lead character," says Jim Pride, Sega Europe's head of product marketing.

Another company enjoying success in reaching the female market is Sky with the games it makes available through its digital set-top boxes. "Overall, 55 per cent of players we have are male and 45 per cent are female," says **David Bishop**, Sky Active's games development manager. "These figures can skew depending on the game, so a sports quiz tends to be more popular with men while something like *Beehive Bedlam* is more popular with women."

The success of titles like the *Puzzle Bobble* clone *Beehive Bedlam*, and the finding that women are ever so slightly more willing to pay for game content from Sky than men, has prompted the broadcaster to be slightly biased towards the female market. "Since realising how popular these games are with women we have changed things like game prizes. Now, when it comes to buying licensed games, we would be more likely to use a licence that appeals to female players," explains **Adrian Pilkington**, head of games at Sky Active.

The problems faced by the rest of the industry could also lie within development teams themselves according to Frontier Developments' David Braben. "The industry is very much concentrated on teenage males and it is a self-fulfilling thing since most games are made by guys for guys and it is very one sided," he notes. But ironically Bam! Entertainment's **Anne-Christine Gasc** believes that more women won't be encouraged into game design until more games appeal to women. "A lot of guys come to high-tech jobs as a result of playing games and as a result of being familiar with technology. Women often have little contact with computers until they are 20, and so end up in less high-tech job roles as they are less familiar and confident with technology. What games can do is show that computers are fun."





Space Channel 5 and *Beehive Bedlam* have both successfully bridged the difficult gender divide





Morally-skewed games such as *Custer's Revenge* are quite likely to appeal to the kind of audience that enjoys shooting wildlife, thus explaining the popularity of *Deer Hunter* in (mostly middle) America

Monochrome mannequins

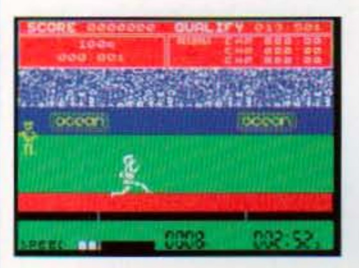
It was something of a shock for a generation of youngsters to discover that Olympic gold medallist, Daley Thompson, was in fact white and not of Afro-Caribbean origin. This was, of course, in the 1984 US Gold title, *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*.

But fast forward to the present day and non-white characters are still largely unrepresented in games. Very few, that are not Japanese, are billed as the hero. Only *Urban Chaos* and *Shadowman* have contained non-white protagonists in recent memory. Even in sports and beat 'em up games, which tend to be the most inclusive, Asian characters are largely absent.

"There are games where you can pick from a number of characters and there never is a single bastard character I can identify with," notes Shahid Ahmad. "I have to go with a black guy but I'm not black, I'm Asian. I want an Asian character in there. Alternatively, I have to go with a white guy but I'm not white, I'm Asian. You've got 16 characters to choose from but not one looks like me."

According to Balbir Blugan, the Asian market isn't perceived as being big enough. "It's like going on trips to the seaside at school and you go to the souvenir shop and you want to get a pen with your name on it," Blugan explains. "I never found a pen with my name on it, never. That's because you're not bringing in good return on investment and so it is not marketed to you."

For Ahmad, provided the game is up to scratch, it will carry the character with it regardless of race. "If you use the race card with an okay idea that's not going to break through to the massmarket. It has to be the race card, consciously or unconsciously, with a mould-breaking idea that will do it," he states. "You have to have the two together otherwise you are not going to do it. And just because you do that once, it doesn't guarantee success with another game like that either."





Daley Thompson's Decathlon portrayed black as white due to technical limitations, but black heroes in videogames are a rare breed. *Shadowman*'s Mike Le Rois is still in a small minority

says Douglas. "But that doesn't seem to happen with women and there are few female protagonists that react in interesting ways. Although Funcom's *The Longest Journey* does manage this quite well, for the most part you don't see Julia Roberts-style regular girls in games."

Well-worn imagery

Similar clichés surround the representation of black and Asian protagonists in games as well, with characters such as *Ready 2 Rumble*'s Afro Thunder and the never-ending stream of Bruce Lee clones in beat 'em ups. Gay and lesbian characters also get the same treatment in the few games in which they do make an appearance. Mincing Village People types combing the warehouse district of *Grand Theft Auto III* is the most obvious example. "Gay people are as diverse a group as any and the stereotypes of an effeminate acting man with a lisp wearing daisy dukes doesn't apply to most of us," says Chris, a gay gamer, of *Grand Theft Auto III*'s moustachioed clones. "It wasn't completely necessary to add that lispy YMCA-looking guy because for all we know one of the gangster guys could be gay or the hookers, or whatever."

Imbuing any game character with even a rudimentary personality is a difficult task and as a result most developers fall back on the well-worn imagery used in cinema to represent particular people. So evil characters are ugly, scarred or deformed, heroes white and blue-eyed, women vulnerable and virginal and gay men camp. "When the backstory for a game is developed there is an obvious discussion a character's look and what effect this will have on the character's personality," says **Piers Blofeld**, managing director of game scripting firm Turning Point. "Some developers will decide that a sly and devia lead character who is also a blonde male hunk is confusing for players as that type c character is usually a hero," Carr concurs. "It is difficult not to resort to using stereotypes, as unlike Hollywood you don' have the dialogue to expand on a character. You could use cut-scenes but most people, myself included, skip through them. So to some extent you have to fall back on stereotyped imagery to use as shorthand for particular characters. In a movie you can get slightly quirky characteristics across which you can't do games. It is difficult to create an anti-hero a game and to put across any idiosyncrasies of a character."

The tendency to fall back on stereotype could be harming the industry, warns Frontier Developments' **David Braben**, particularly if it wants to reach out to more than just young males. "One of the steps we need to take is producing more interesting dialogue," notes Braben, who insists that his next project, currently unde wraps, will do this. "The characterisation o women in games is terrible and hideously sexist and the lack of women does make







Although females are making it into beat 'em ups, such as *Dead or Alive 3*, Asians are still unrepresented. *Ready 2 Rumble*'s Afro Thunder is yet another example of videogame stereotyping

games feel like a niche activity. Games are looked down on by half the population because of their violence and their treatment of women." **Jim Pride**, Sega Europe's head of product marketing, also feels these changes need to take place. "The size of the games industry at the moment is huge but we can only get bigger if we produce content that draws in more users whether that be women or people of a particular sexual orientation. We need equivalents to chick flicks and guy flicks."

Under pressure

However, actually reaching that stage is fraught with problems, particularly from a publishing point of view. Games can cost millions to make and shareholders are likely to be unimpressed if a publisher spends a fortune making a game with a wider audience in mind only to find the massmarket and traditional gaming community ignore it. The business pressure to stick with the familiar is almost choking and only firms such as Sega with its army of development staff can afford to dabble on the borders of the known market. "Publishers know if they work to a certain formula they are more likely to make money," argues Ahmad. "For example, take 'East is East'. A fantastic film but it is never going to be massmarket. It is about an Asian family and who wants a story about an Asian family? A lot of this country doesn't. America certainly doesn't – less so after September 11. But if you wanted to make a videogame out of something like 'East is East' how much would it cost you to do it justice – a million quid? How many units is it going to sell? Are you going to break even? No. It is much harder to do niche videogames or a game with niche characters or a niche story than it is to make a niche film."

Blugan believes, if sold in a palatable way, such a game could prove a success in a similar way to the film 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon'. "'Crouching Tiger' did so well in the west because it was made with a western audience in mind," she explains. "It shows that traditional cultural things can go down well in a society that doesn't understand it and does not want to understand it. So to make money out of it you have to tailor it." Other efforts to reach out to traditionally non-gaming markets, particularly women, had also been made by Microsoft in the run up to the launch of the Xbox.

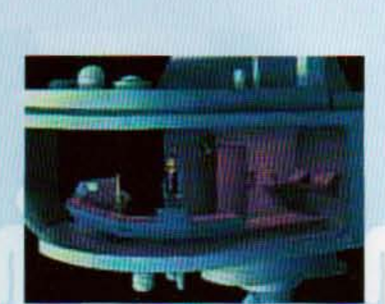


Research shows that female gamers prefer less violent games, often with humour and complexity, as evidenced in *Munch's Oddysee*

> "The pressure to stick with the familiar is almost choking and only firms such as Sega can afford to dabble on the borders of the known market"

Among a series of efforts to get women interested in the console, Microsoft held a women-only Xbox preview night, went round to magazines such as 'Cosmopolitan' to show off the Xbox and hired female student representatives to promote the console to the university market. "We see the Xbox brand as being inclusive, positive, creative, passionate and stimulating so we don't want it to be dark and mysterious to women. We want to pull away from it being something men do in their bedrooms and provide a more inclusive experience," says **Michele Marchand**, brand product manager for the Xbox. "We see *Munch's Oddysee* as a key title for attracting women gamers as it contains emotive characters but also *Dead or Alive 3* as it is a very sexy game."

But Microsoft's attempts to seduce women outside of the gaming sphere is still an uphill struggle. 'Cosmopolitan' was



Back in 1995 *The Orion Conspiracy* featured a father who discovered that his son was gay. A bold plotline, dealt with in a sensitive manner

Playing for the other side

Unsurprisingly, given the highly polarised views on homosexuality across the world (in the US gay sex remains illegal in some states) games featuring gay and lesbian characters are rare. Despite all characters in *The Sims* being bisexual by default and the existence of gay-themed clothes for your Sims lurking on the Net, other games have been more coy about the subject. The villagers in Lionhead Studio's *Black & White*, for example. Originally the plan had been to make one in ten of the villagers homosexual and instead of pairing up with a member of the opposite sex they would move in with a same-sex partner. However, when Peter Molyneux revealed the plan, it received a hostile reception from some gamers. Eventually the one-in-ten plan was scaled down to a single digit percentage of the population and left undiscussed.

However, not all games with gay content have tried to shut the closet door. *Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix* grabbed a few headlines when publisher Eidos let slip about the game's lead characters being a lesbian couple. In addition there are the pair of flirty and sadomasochistically-inclined lesbian gangsters featured in *GTAIII*. But neither of these were introduced to woo a lesbian market – they were there to appeal to boys and men.

However, there are examples where the use of gay characters has not slipped into cliché, such as PC adventure game *The Orion Conspiracy*. Released in 1995 by the now-defunct publisher Domark, the game cast the player in the role of a father attempting to find the truth behind the murder of his son aboard a spacestation. As the game progresses the father discovers his son was gay and he meets his child's former lover. **Tardie**, a gay artist who worked on *The Orion Conspiracy* and now works for Climax, says the inclusion sparked very little reaction. "When I first read the script I was quite surprised. It was a very daring thing for Domark to do," he admits. "The gay character was embedded in the game and you found out about it as you questioned people and discovered more about your son. It got quite charged as the father did not know so you got to see how he handled it."



Black & White is proud to be gay – though not quite as proud as originally intended

Shop Fever

Step into your local game store and you can bet your bottom dollar that nine times out of ten the shop will be filled with male staff and male customers. Compared to the customers filling the adjacent shops, game retailers look like some descent of working men's clubs.

Anne-Christine Gasc, a senior producer at Bam! Entertainment, feels changes at the shop floor are just as vital as changes in game content and marketing if the industry is to appeal to more women. "I'm 30 years old, I work in the industry and I'm a confident person but I still find it very intimidating going into game stores," she admits. "You do stand out being the only woman in there. The staff also tend to patronise women and when I go in to buy a game they often assume I'm a mum buying a game for my kids."

The whole culture of game buying is extremely off-putting to women believes Gasc. "You go in, pick up an empty box, pay and then leave. Women want to mill around and they don't want to look at empty boxes," says Gasc. "I would like to see them sell other merchandise associated with games, like t-shirts, to have more rolling demos on display and booths where I can try out the games without everyone watching. Women want to touch things and try things out before buying them. They could also have nicer window displays rather than just sticking packaging in them."



dismissive when **Edge** asked if its preview of the Xbox would result in column inches. "We wouldn't cover it, it is not something that our readers are interested in," snorted a member of the editorial team when asked. 'Cosmo's attitude, and those of other women's magazines, provokes annoyance from Blugan. "They should be printing it, they have features on female mechanics and women in the aeronautical industry and so on, but they are absolutely not interested in covering anything to do with games or technology," she says.

No way out

Rhona Robson, a senior programmer at Kuju, who has recently worked on *Microsoft Train Simulator*, agrees: "There is no actual way of advertising games to women. All the women's magazines are the same and they're basically selling cosmetics, clothes and jewellery. I personally find it hard as there are no women's magazines that I want to buy and while I like what is in the men's technology magazines, I don't want to be sold technology with a page three model draped over the cover."

But if female and non-white gamers are ignored by the industry, spare a thought for the gay community. Fact is, little research has been conducted on the number of gay and lesbian videogame players, so no one knows how much they spend on games. On top of this, some publishers would rather not have their games perceived as popular with gay men or lesbians as was the case after the gay press began to show an interest in Lara Croft when the 'Tomb Raider' film was released. One gay magazine was refused pictures of the digital Lara Croft by Core Design on the grounds that, "We don't really want Lara at this point to come across as a lesbian or gay icon. We do not want to portray her in that way because she wouldn't ever do that. We have quite a rigid set of guidelines about what she will and won't do and becoming gay icon is one thing she would not do."

> "We don't want Lara to come across as a lesbian or gay icon. We do not want to portray her in that way because she wouldn't ever do that"

Despite reluctance among some publishers, others have been more willing to approach the gay community, notably Sony which made its presence felt at the London Mardi Gras gay pride events in recent years. Despite the monetary pressure for the industry to remain in its cultural cul de sac, most developers are hopeful that change is inevitable, the only question is how long it will take and whether it is the industry or the buying public who will drive the change. "We can't really chain ourselves to the railings demanding female brand characters in games," notes Blugan. "There is a limit to what we can do, and anyway is it a case of us driving the change or should the consumers drive the change?"

Ahmad believes such change must come from within the industry. "The games have to come first and they will create the market," he insists. "The huge problem you have right now in fostering change, is that costs too much. Once the technology, platforms and middleware get good







The Sims proves that videogame characters can be proud of their homosexuality. The open nature of the game, combined with online creativity, has led to a number of skins and clothing accessories




Although *Grand Theft Auto III* plays it for laughs some might object to the blatant YMCA-ing of gay figures. Argonaut's *Orchid* makes the bold move of having not just one, but three female leads

enough you can bolt them together and then add characters, creativity and design very cheaply. The whole game-building process becomes a design and art issue rather than a programmer-led issue. That is when things will change because the economics will mean you can sell a game to 100,000 people and still bring in money."

Very bad things

Despite the accusations of stereotyping that have been levelled at *Grand Theft Auto III*, Ahmad believes it may yet take a publisher like Rockstar to actually open the doors for the rest of the industry. "The breakthrough has to come from a really big, risk-taking publisher and the only one out there at the moment taking big risks is Take 2/Rockstar with *Grand Theft Auto III*," states Ahmad. "Nobody else would have had the guts to do it. You can do absolutely obscene things in that game, it is a truly outrageous amoral game but it has been a huge success so everybody wants to do something like that now."

A general move towards more mixed game content may be two or three years away but there are signs that the industry is making slow cautious steps forward. From the rising number of games with women characters to EA's willingness to highlight the gay aspects of *The Sims* in US television commercials.

Mitchell believes it is only a matter of time before the industry will make even greater efforts to target an audience outside its white, male and straight image. "Look at TV. For years you never saw any black faces selling anything and I remember my mum used to say, 'What, we don't buy soap powder or washing up liquid?' But now they've fallen over themselves because they realise that that market is big and it's money and it is the same with the Asian market. Eventually the games industry will say, 'We need to find a new market, what haven't we touched? Oh – Asian kids, black kids, they'll buy this stuff.' And so they will push it to them."

Highlights and lowlights

Tomb Raider

(Eidos, Core Design, 1996, Saturn/PlayStation)



Groundbreaking she may have been, but Lara Croft still remains a creation designed for a male market – how well Core's creation did in attracting women gamers is open to speculation. But while Lara was no great liberator, the flood of clones that followed in her wake, usually set apart only by larger breasts, thinner waists and more flesh on show, is the worst feature of her legacy.

The Sims

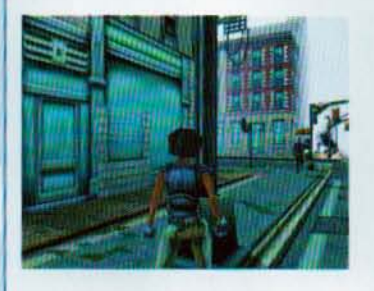
(Electronic Arts, Maxis, 2000, PC)



Phenomenally successful and one of the few games to feature homosexuality. The popularity of the title is such that EA is now even screening TV adverts in the US referring openly to the ability to create gay and lesbian Sims. In addition, the game's cult gay following has produced various gay-themed skins for the title including Sims with 'Boys will do boys' t-shirts.

Urban Chaos

(Eidos, Mucky Foot, 1999, PlayStation/PC)



Published at the time when Lara Croft clones were filling shop shelves, Mucky Foot opted to step away from the deformed 'beauty' of Lara Croft and deliver a black female character. The decision to clothe the character in flak-jacket and gun holsters also minimised the level of breast and buttock definition so popular with designers of female characters.

Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix

(Eidos, Kronos, 2001, PlayStation)



Fronted by two lipstick lesbians and backed by an advertising campaign aimed at appealing to men with threesome fantasies, *Fear Effect 2* often verged on the exploitative. Cut-scenes featuring the pair stripping off for a quickie in a lift emphasised the point. Finally the decision to cast one of the pair as a hooker (and therefore available to men) made its true intentions clear.

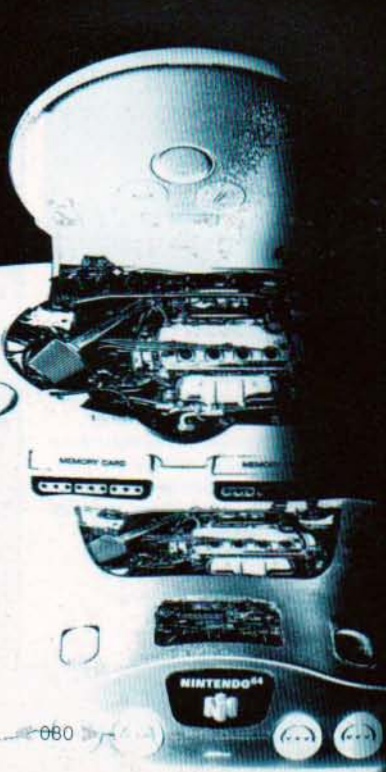
Soldier of Fortune

(Activision, Raven, 2000, PC)



The ultra-violent firstperson shooter faced accusations of racism after it emerged that the penalties meted out to players who slaughtered American civilians did not apply when butchering Iraqi civilians. In a statement at the time developer Raven argued the decision was consistent with the title's mission structure and the player "as in real war" must make "tough choices based on their own morality." The game remained unchanged and Codemasters have confirmed that this questionable 'feature' will be appearing in its forthcoming console conversions of the game. America's 'war on terrorism' continues unabated, then.

THE NEED FOR SPEED



OPTIMISING CODE FOR THE XBOX, PS2 AND GAMECUBE IS ALREADY A VITAL ASPECT OF MODERN GAME DEVELOPMENT, BUT HAS THE PLAYSTATION GENERATION OF CODERS REALLY LEARNED ANYTHING FROM THEIR PREVIOUS EFFORTS?



The console versus the PC is an eternal debate for gamers. It's akin to the question, "Are you a cat or a dog person?" While there are a handful of broadminded (not to say rich) gamers who espouse the virtues of both, most prefer either the aloof inscrutability of the PC or the loyal simplicity of the console. It's fun and ultimately meaningless. For developers, however, the matter takes on more importance.

"It would be nice to work on a platform where you know exactly what you can do and that all the extra you're getting out of the machine is worthwhile," confesses **Mark Webley**, programmer and producer at Lionhead Studios. "You tend to be a bit lazy on the PC." For example, *Black & White* was developed for a minimum PC specification of 64Mb of RAM, but it's being reworked for PlayStation which only has 32Mb of RAM. "The reason is, we were a bit sloppy in the way we handled textures," Webley explains. "On the PC you know when you've finished a line of code, there's not much point focusing on it because a faster PC has just come out."

In contrast, consoles present the dedicated coder with years of learning. "Consoles give you a fixed target," says **Simeon Pashley**, former technical director at Teque Software, the studio

Sony's secret weapon

Ever since Kazunori Yamauchi let slip that *Gran Turismo* had been developed using something called the 'Performance Analyzer', this piece of debugging hardware has gained an almost mythical status. The truth lies somewhere between the mundane and the fantastic however. "The Performance Analyzer is the final stage of optimising your code," explains Attention To Detail's **Stephen Bennett**. "It can help a lot, but only if your code is slow in the first place. Most other times it helps to find a 10–20 per cent speed improvement."

Lost Toys' **Jeremy Longley** is more enthusiastic. "On the PlayStation, it was by far and away the coolest debugging tool I've ever seen," he says. "You can get right down to the lowest possible level of detail (including timings on both sides of the clock signal) and was invaluable in ekeing out the last dregs of performance on *MoHo*. It's not a replacement for other debugging tools, or for optimising your code, but for the last stages of optimisation, or for finding obscure low-levels bugs, it's invaluable."

But not everyone sees the Performance Analyzer as a magic wand guaranteeing good performance. "We didn't use the Performance Analyzer for *Jak and Daxter*," says Naughty Dog chairman **Andy Gavin**. "It wasn't available when we started the project and by the time it arrived, we were in the midst of development" – and then the bombshell – "We tend to do our analysis the old fashioned way – by hand."

Naughty Dog president **Jason Rubin** takes up the story. "We have a contractor who loves working out the timings on paper. He'll come in and say, 'You're hypothetically eight cycles off on this loop and the code programmer will be like, 'No way', but sure enough it's eight cycles off. Which is nothing but if you are doing something a million times, that's two per cent of your performance. Doing it by hand may be harder but our guys like it and it ends up equally as good as doing it with the Analyzer."

For the mere mortals of game development, Sony expects to be shipping the Performance Analyzer for PlayStation2 early next year, much earlier in the console's lifecycle than the original PlayStation analyser shipped.



which was porting *Black & White* to PlayStation before becoming defunct. "Since *Theme Park*, our first product on PlayStation, we have learned a tremendous amount. We've built up our own toolsets which allow us to implement techniques such as using the PlayStation's hardware to alpha-blend two textures together to create a third. We're using this for *Black & White*'s creature morphing." Other tricks Teque is pulling include using non-standard polygon types to generate the particle effects which are a characteristic of Lionhead's god game, as well as offloading the game's heavy AI requirements via the PlayStation's rendering capabilities.

Tinkering for turbocharge

The closed nature of console development forces programmers to continually think about optimising their game code and designs to fit the available architecture. Learning the tricks and hacks they don't teach in the official documentation is another crucial skill. In the past, this process has been typified by the PlayStation. While many developers have worked on second- and third-generation PlayStation titles, others managed to clock up fourth-, and even fifth-generation games, somehow making each one more impressive.

UK developers, particularly some of the lower profile contract studios, have been notable successes in these improvement stakes. Mainly, this is thanks to the UK's history of low-level coding combined with the number of games they have worked on, and a result of the shorter development cycles required by such projects.

The humble PlayStation architecture is perhaps the most well known among current developers

"We've achieved well over a 300 per cent performance improvement between the start of development on PlayStation and its end," boasts **Andrew Hersee**, technical manager of Silicon Dreams, a developer typical of these unsung players. Part of the Kaboom Studios group, it specialises in sports titles for publishers such as Take 2. "*Olympic Soccer* was the first 3D title many of the team had worked on," Hersee says. "Our players ranged from 30 flat-shaded polygons to 100 polygons, of which 15 or so were textured. We didn't even animate the models in realtime. Instead we stored a snapshot of the position of each polygon for every animation frame."

Two years later, Silicon Dreams developed *World League Soccer '98*, which featured models of around 280 fully textured polygons. These were animated using an 11-bone skeleton. "After another three products we come to our last PlayStation title, *UEFA Champions League 2000/2001*," continues Hersee. "Now, the polygon count has increased to 330 per player, while we are skinning the models and using 17-bone skeletons." Only the hardware is the same.

Good times ahead?

This cut and thrust of low level programming isn't just historically interesting, however. With the PC in a relative decline in the face of the combined momentum of GameCube, PlayStation2 and Xbox, console optimisation is becoming an essential technical skill. But there is some disagreement among even experienced UK studios, on how many of the performance jumps of the past will be seen in the future.



Blitz Interactive's *Chicken Run*, an adaptation of the animation film, combines clever coding with a mixture of fully lit and gouraud-shaded polygons to push the game's graphical grunt



Perhaps the greatest example of the difficulty of the console coders' art is Teque Software's PlayStation port of Lionhead's PC title *Black & White*, now being handled by Blade Interactive

"So far, we've doubled our polygon throughput in *TimeSplitters2*, but there's some way to go," reckons Free Radical Design's **Steve Ellis**, one of the few programmers to be in the midst of his second PlayStation2 title. "We're probably using under 70 per cent of the PS2's power. It's a complex machine and it's not always obvious where performance bottlenecks are. It's early days at the moment, developers still have to go to Sony's office to use the Performance Analyzer [see 'Sony's secret weapon'], which is a little restrictive."

"On PlayStation2 we know it's possible to get over 20 million polys a second out of the machine. We're running at under half that on *Lego Racers 2*, so we've definitely got room for improvement," says Attention To Detail's lead programmer, **Tim Swan**. Hersee is less sure though. "In the past, most of the performance improvements were down to people learning how to write 3D games," he cautions. "We now have over seven years of experience and when we start work on a new console, given sensible development



Lost Toys' first (and only) PlayStation game *MoHo* just managed to fit into the available 2Mb of video memory, thanks to some clever hackery courtesy of programmer Jeremy Longley



A few notable UK devcos – including DMA (now Rockstar) and Rare – spent years optimising N64 code, but how much those tricks and tweaks transfer over to present hardware formats is questionable



This is what state-of-the-art PlayStation games looked like in 1996. At its lowest level, *Olympic Soccer*'s players consisted of a mere 30 flat shaded polygons. Five years on, Silicon Dreams' *UEFA Champions League 2000/2001* has upped this to 330 fully textured polys

times we can push a console quite hard in the first wave of products. I'd expect around a 150 per cent performance gain for next-gen consoles, but we saw less than this on our second and third generation of Dreamcast titles."

Another one who reckons getting to grips with Sony's original console architecture has paid dividends in terms of PS2 optimisation is **Andrew Perella**, programming manager at racing game-oriented Eutechnyx. "When we developed for the PlayStation, it was like learning to walk," he says, of the five titles the company developed for Sony's original console. "We're already familiar with the way in which the PlayStation2 operates, thanks to the work we've done on PlayStation. Now we know how to walk, we can also run."

What Perella does concede is that while developers are unlikely to experience the crude performance jumps of previous years, there will be opportunities to unlock more interesting techniques. "I would expect an improvement in lighting and dynamic polygons," he says. "The number of effects that can be used when plotting a polygon is huge. We're scratching the surface. I'd hope the game experience will increase, too, as more of the time previously devoted to improving a game's performance can be used to enhance gameplay."

"We've achieved well over a 300 per cent performance improvement between the start of development on PlayStation and its end"

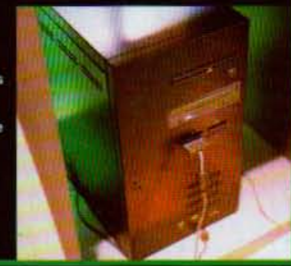
Fred Williams, development team programmer, at veteran developer Blitz agrees. "There's a vast amount of scope for some giant leaps performance-wise on the PlayStation2," he says. "On the more straightforward next-gen hardware, you'll see less of a polygon performance jump, and developers should be able to concentrate on leaps in playability and innovation, rather than endlessly trying to get the hardware to draw a polygon faster."

Microsoft's Xbox is a particularly interesting case in this respect. Constructed from off-the-shelf PC components, at first sight it's unlikely to offer developers the same amount of untapped power as PlayStation2 or even GameCube, which mixes a relatively straightforward IBM CPU with a custom-designed graphics chip.

PS2 inner workings

It's been a long time coming, but Sony has reached the stage where the PS2 Performance Analyzer can be released. First made available to developers mid-way through 2001, but with only one prototype unit per territory, Sony has been re-engineering the £100,000-plus analyser to fit the price and size of a piece of production hardware. Unveiled at GDC, the PlayStation2 Performance Analyzer is now compacted to the size of a large PC unit; tiny compared to the bench-size configuration of the prototype. Eventually, it should be released to all PlayStation2 developers as part of the standard PS2 devkit, although a complete rollout is likely to take the best part of 2002.

Simply described, the Performance Analyzer gives developers a window into the inner working of games running on the PlayStation2 hardware. There are three probes, one which deals with the Emotion Engine, and two on the Graphics Synthesiser chip. The probes tag all the inputs and outputs into those pieces of silicon. The result is an array of graphic displays which allows developers to see how efficiently they are utilising both the system's bandwidth and the chips at various points of the game. The level of detail can even extend to looking at how the system is rendering single polygons within a scene. This is important because the PlayStation2 has a more complex architecture, as well as less RAM, than the Xbox or GameCube. Hence programmers need to take more care to ensure there are no bottlenecks in their code and that they are using system resources as efficiently as possible. This is almost impossible to quantify without hardware such as the Performance Analyzer.



Core keeps schtum

Few developers had more experience of PlayStation than the staff of Core Design, which managed to squeeze five *Tomb Raider* games into the console's lifecycle, accumulating sales of over 15 million. Sadly, they were less than forthcoming concerning the increases in performance during Lara's adventures. Modestly (and slightly unbelievably) all they would say was, "Numbers are pretty meaningless. I don't think we've ever taken the time to count the number of polygons. We push as many as we can." And, "The performance analyser's effect was pretty dramatic on the PlayStation. It didn't make a huge difference to hand-optimised code but was useful for showing up bottlenecks in C code, often showing flaws in program design, rather than just the code itself."

Major improvements to the *Tomb Raider* game technology included dynamic lighting (added in *TR2*), multi-coloured lighting, curved surfaces, semi-transparencies, improved water effects and high resolution textures (*TR3*), and a fundamental engine overhaul including environmental mapping and spotlights (*TR:TLR*).

Tomb Raider



Tomb Raider 2



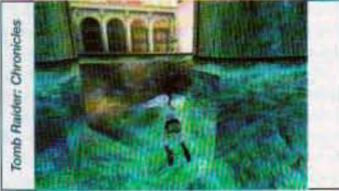
Tomb Raider 3



TR: The Last Revelation



Tomb Raider: Chronicles



Tricks of the trade 1

Martin Edmondson, Reflections

"When we were working on *Shadow of the Beast*, we needed to pack more data on to the disc so we played around with a few compression routines. We then discovered a method of writing more information to an Amiga disc by slowing down the rotation speed while writing to it at the same speed, therefore packing more data onto the disc. To do this we glued a Kellogg's cornflake box to the flywheel of the drive which acted like a big wing, physically slowing the drive down. By snipping off bits of the box we were able to reach the optimum speed, at least until the drive was ruined."

Tricks of the trade 2

Jeremy Longley, Lost Toys

"Towards the end of *MoHo* we were seriously running out of memory for code. We'd packed the game into 2Mb, but as we added final features like memory card access, cheat codes, etc, the space the code took up crossed the line. And it's a hard line – you can't have 2.001Mb on a PlayStation. After replacing a cool collision routine for the physics with one that was almost as good, but was half the size, we were still about 10K over, and a week to go. I ended up running a stress test on the game, and watching how much stack space was actually used (of the 32K allocated), and coded into the stack, up to about 100 bytes short of the lowest point that I'd seen it reach. Thankfully Sony didn't notice, and I've never seen the game crash with a stack overflow."



Moho

With a little help from my friends

Although developers are often seen as being in competition with each other, tricks and hacks often get passed around the community. "A developer may well find a superfast way to do 'X', and will often decide to do the philanthropic thing and post it to the Sony newsgroups, talk about it at the Game Developer Conference, or tell their mates via an email/pub conversation," says Blitz's Fred Williams. "For example, the technical aspects of *Spyro*'s pastel-shaded landscape rendering technique, albeit not the source code, was widely publicised. Sadly, it was only suited for games that looked kinda *Spyro*-ey."

Another reason that techniques, once discovered, are quickly cloned is down to the more practical consideration of reverse engineering, reckons Silicon Dream's Andrew Hersee. "If we see a feature in a game we can usually work out how it's done," he says. "It can often be the case that we haven't tried it yet because there was no guarantee that it could be done. Seeing it elsewhere lets us know that there is a solution and then we can usually find it."



Eutechnyx's first-generation PlayStation games such as 1997's *Total Drivin'* and 1999's *Max Power Racing* got a performance boost thanks to the developer's decision to take the time to write its own code libraries

"I'd hope to get another 10-20 per cent out of the console," predicts **Roger Perkins**, senior programmer at Bizarre Creations, which shipped *Project Gotham* for Xbox's US launch. "There were several avenues of optimisation that we didn't have time to explore if we wanted to hit launch. There's certainly more power there we can tap into."

But in spite of Xbox's design, Perkins thinks the sheer power of the next-gen consoles means that it will take time for their creators to work out how to unlock the potential within. "The newer hardware's secrets can take even the people that design them time to find and document. I think nVidia is still learning what the Xbox graphics chip is capable of," he says, adding, "Microsoft has given us as much access to the power of the hardware as it can at the moment. It is finding new pieces of information about the way all the hardware works together."

And as Blitz's Fred Williams points out, nVidia's unified driver concept means that Xbox games should get performance boosts every time a new set of drivers is released. Assuming Xbox's hard drive will allow drivers to be stored on the box's operating system rather than burned onto the game disk, this should even apply to previously released games. "Xbox's launch games got as close to the nVidia hardware as nVidia were prepared to let them get at the time," says Williams. "As it gets old and decrepit, nVidia will be releasing more information about how to drive the hardware better so the performance of the games should improve."

With *TimeSplitters2* now Xbox bound, Steve Ellis doesn't pull any punches about what he thinks will be the console's key optimisation path. "The best thing Microsoft could do to help developers achieve maximum performance from Xbox is to allow them to ditch DirectX," he fumes. "Like Sony, Microsoft should provide full low-level details of the hardware and let the developers create their own libraries which are optimised for the game being developed."

"There's a vast amount of scope for some giant leaps performance-wise on the PlayStation2"



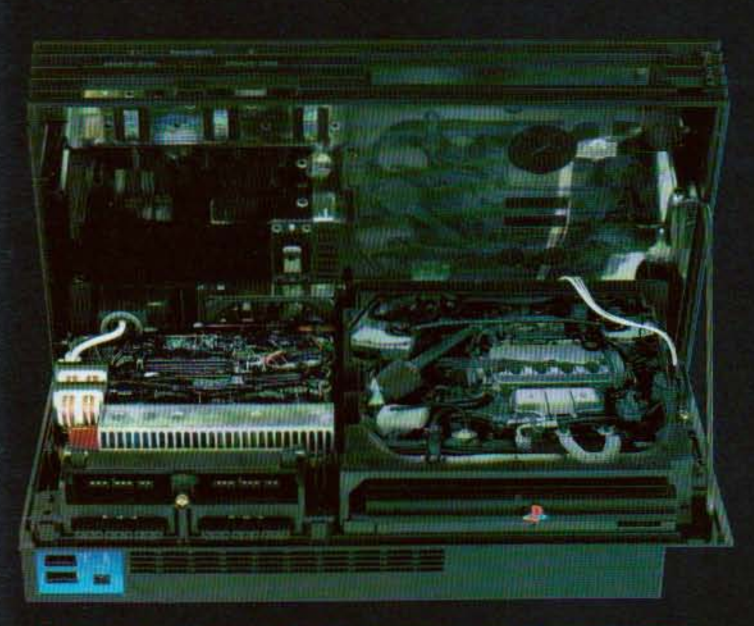
Many coders attest to the robust, even elegant Dreamcast architecture, but too few publishers were willing to take the risk with Sega's machine. We may never know how far it could have been pushed

Control from the top

Often unspoken outside of developer circles, the indirect influence cast by hardware manufacturers over their systems can seriously affect the way developers approach their programming task. "With the original PlayStation, Sony was not very open about certain aspects of its low-level architecture," recalls Reflection's MD **Martin Edmondson**.



While it used transparencies and fog, Blitz Interactive's *Glover* didn't have any lighting and suffered from framerate dips. Lessons were learned and *Chicken Run*, Blitz's next PS title, had double the performance level of *Glover*



Early coding for the PS2 was simply a headache for some developers, but the convoluted parallel architecture is starting to reap rewards. Some would argue that it has to, considering Sony's lead

"As an example, *Destruction Derby* was written almost completely in C, whereas sizeable chunks of our *Driver* games were written in R3000 machine code and directly to the PlayStation's hardware registers. This was originally frowned upon by the manufacturer, but I think Sony realised the best quality software was created by coding at a low level. From day one, Sony has been been forthcoming about PlayStation2's low-level architecture."

Early PlayStation developers also found themselves limited by Sony's insistence that they use official code libraries – a practice that was withdrawn, though not before more than one developer decided to ignore the edict and write their own custom code anyway. Things got so heated that a studio lead programmer reportedly asked the head of Sony if the last platform its in-house development team had created libraries for was a TV remote controller. Ironically though, locking developers down to the official libraries was one of the reasons that there was such a massive jump in performance during the early years of the PlayStation.

"If we had used vendor-supplied libraries and data formats and continued to use them, our performance gain over the PlayStation's lifecycle would have been less than double," explains Blitz's Fred Williams. In contrast, using official libraries for a first title and then switching to custom-code for the second-generation game would have resulted in a tripling of performance he suggests. "As soon as you start custom-optimising code or optimising data formats with optimal code in mind for a specific game, then performance jumps," Williams says. "Using vendor libraries prevents this, because they're tied to particular data formats. In my experience almost all good code optimisation relies on a matching change in the format of the data that the code uses."

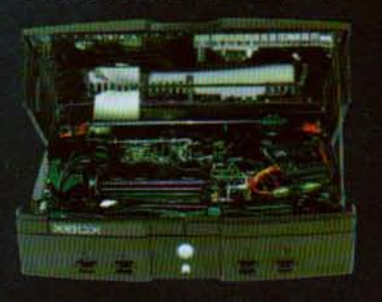
Optimisation isn't only about plain coding though. With a beady eye on the economics of development, Reflections' Martin Edmondson warns that unlocking a console's hidden depths always comes with a price tag. "Our first PlayStation game was *Destruction Derby*. The average number of polys per frame was 700," he says. "*Driver* was our first game to use Sony's performance analyser. The average number of polys on screen shot up to 2,100, but the *Driver 2* average moved up by only a few to 2,500 per frame. Performance increases rapidly in early years, performance against investment in optimisation became a case of diminishing returns." And it is this, finally, which marks the end of the coders' learning curve; hard cash being something even the smartest studios and the coolest hardware have no defence against. ■





From *Destruction Derby* to *Driver* and *Driver 2*, Reflections is a textbook example of a studio which got to grips with the PlayStation architecture and pushed the envelope further than most gamers thought was possible. But while there was a big jump from *Destruction Derby*'s 700 polys per frame to *Driver*'s 2,100, *Driver 2* was a case of diminishing returns. A much more complex game in terms of technical features such as curved roads the poly count only rose modestly as a result, to 2,500 per frame

Although the Xbox is built with off-the-shelf PC components, developers still have all the problems of coding to solid state architecture. Therefore, optimisation still remains a priority





Tricks of the trade 3

Fred Williams, Blitz Interactive

"The biggest single performance jump during the development of the *Chicken Run* PlayStation model 'n' map renderers was achieved by storing all the vertex numbers 'pre-multiplied by 4' (because the things they were referring to were all 4 bytes in size). This required both a data and code change from Blitz's existing in-house library code.

The model rendering code was written in C, but we looked at the assembler code the C compilers generated, and then tweaked it to produce assembler as good as hand-coded stuff. In this case, the code contained a load of 'shift left twos' that weren't in the original C: there were three of them per polygon, in fact. Then all we had to do was spot the reason for their presence, and fix it. Presto: faster (albeit less pretty) code. The downside was that it gave the poor souls doing the Dreamcast and PC ports a bit of a headache."

Chicken Run



Tricks of the trade 4

Andrew Perella, Eutechnyx

"Say you have a building that's only ever seen from one angle. There are polygons and textures being used at the rear of the building, but the player will never see them. The technical solution to that could be to write some form of 3D occlusion processing routine, but, if you're never going to see the back of the building anyway, why bother when you can do it by hand – that is, not bother building it in the first place – and save everybody a lot of work."

Total Drivin'



Max Power Racing



Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's PC is an Intel 1.7Ghz / 1 Gig RAM / GeForce3, kindly provided by **iwantitnow.co.uk**

Edge's most played

Halo: Combat Evolved

Take two Warthogs on Silent Cartographer, and race them. Or try and shoot the pilot out of the very first Banshee you get attacked by. Or just play. All night.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Frequency

Edge's eyes are watering, but our ears are soothed by the likes of 'Science Genius Girl' – Freezepop's synth-ballad of prodigious intelligence and lab coats.



(PlayStation2) SCEA

Ico

A beautiful, beautiful game and not just aesthetically. There's a purity of design you rarely find these days – and it's just one of the reasons Ico deserves success.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Project Eden

Okay, it may have lame combat, but the puzzles are genuinely challenging while remaining logical. An unusually thoughtful game for the PS2 generation.



(PlayStation2) Eidos

Send in the Clones

First the worst, second the best...?

There's a week to go before **Edge** goes to press, and Nintendo has just announced that Amusement Vision will be cooperating with it on a Triforce and GameCube update of *F-Zero*. Nagoshi-san's team will be predominantly responsible for the programming side, while Nintendo – specifically Shigeru Miyamoto, Takaya Imamura, and Isshi Shimuzu – will focus on the title's artistic direction. The news that a Nagoshi/Miyamoto dream team are working on the *F-Zero* franchise has surprised many. The fact that a next-gen update of the brand is coming has not.

Updated versions of *Animal Forest*, *1080° Snowboarding*, *Kirby*, *Mario*, *Mario Kart*, *Mario Tennis*, *Mario Golf*, *Metroid*, *Smash Brothers*, *Star Fox*, *WaveRace*, and *Zelda* are here, nearly here, or definitely on their way. It would be a surprise if *Donkey Kong*, *Mario Party*, *Pokémon*, and *Pilotwings* don't appear. For a machine that, according to the hardcore, is the home of innovation, it's something of an eye-opener. *Doshin the Giant*, reviewed this month, is just an update – albeit one that few people have had the lackadaisical pleasure of experiencing previously – and *Animal Leader* might well be an example of in-house creativity, but it appears to have been rushed and fleshed out from an N64 skeleton.

Of course, it's not just a symptom of Nintendo; reliance on brand goes cross format. *Jedi Knight II* has an impressive ancestry – *Dark Forces* and *Jedi Knight* were both worthy of the 'Star Wars' name – but Raven's sequel-by-numbers fails to live up to its forefathers' reputations. That won't stop it from selling, of course, but hopefully it'll make those who buy on the strength of a name more reluctant to invest in LucasArts' apparently increasingly cynical production values.

So, is it depressing that the best game this issue is another long-established series, albeit one that's new to Nintendo? Not really. *GunValkyrie* might be a new name in gaming, but the abhorrent pixel perfect jumping it resorts to isn't new at all; it takes *Manic Miner*'s frustration, and brings it to a decade where it doesn't belong. *Biohazard*, in theory a retread, actually uses the power of the next-generation hardware to make the strengths of the series – fear and atmosphere – even stronger, and expands it in new directions for those who've already experienced the shock tactics before. It's much more than a director's cut, and shows that, while hearing about update after update can be disheartening, it's better to judge games on gameplay rather than on concepts.











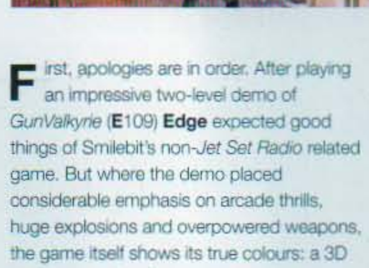
GunValkyrie

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Smilebit** Price: **¥7,800 (£41)** Release: **Out now (Japan/US), May 2 (UK)**



Weapons are assigned to the X and Y buttons, with a hookshot-style grapple assigned to the B button. Judicious selection of weaponry is vital to get through the tougher stages







The environments are very impressive and often convey a cloying sense of claustrophobia. Unfortunately, slowdown does become prevalent when too many explosions fill the screen

First, apologies are in order. After playing an impressive two-level demo of *GunValkyrie* (**E**109) **Edge** expected good things of Smilebit's non-*Jet Set Radio* related game. But where the demo placed considerable emphasis on arcade thrills, huge explosions and overpowered weapons, the game itself shows its true colours: a 3D action game that focuses too much on platform negotiation.

Naglfar's Pit, in particular, seems to have been designed by a sadist. The mission goal is to reach the top of an enclosed chamber by boosting upwards and jumping across a ridiculous number of platforms. But because the boost facility only operates for a short period of time, any false move results in your character plummeting to the bottom to start the sorry process again. The route to the top is obscure and bland textures on the cavern ledges will see you slipping back to oblivion more times than is good for your sanity.

The margin for error is infinitesimal and matters are not helped by platforms that crumble underfoot and swirls of gas which threaten to knock you off the precarious footholds. And if this wasn't capricious enough, an assortment of creatures bombard you with missiles to knock you back to the foot of the pit. This is trial and error gaming at its very worst.

Some would argue that *GunValkyrie* is a tribute to old-school values. But even *Manic Miner* had a control mechanism that was simple and intuitive. Platform negotiation can be satisfying if the player is given a control interface which is uncluttered and simple to adopt. And while *GunValkyrie*'s emphasis on jumping and boosting is in many ways innovative, it's a little too fussy for the demands of the environments. Reaching a platform after 20 jumps is one thing, but trying to reach it with a triple boost combo will stretch your patience to its limits.

GunValkyrie is at its best when the player is faced with hordes of enemy creatures across open landscapes. Once more powerful weapons and targeting capabilities are purchased, the action can be frantic and exhilarating. But such moments are rare.

The game broadly delivers three types of level – open landscapes with the odd ledge to negotiate, deep shafts requiring skilful

Some would argue that GunValkyrie is a tribute to old-school values. But even Manic Miner had a control mechanism that was intuitive

Previously in E100, E105, E109



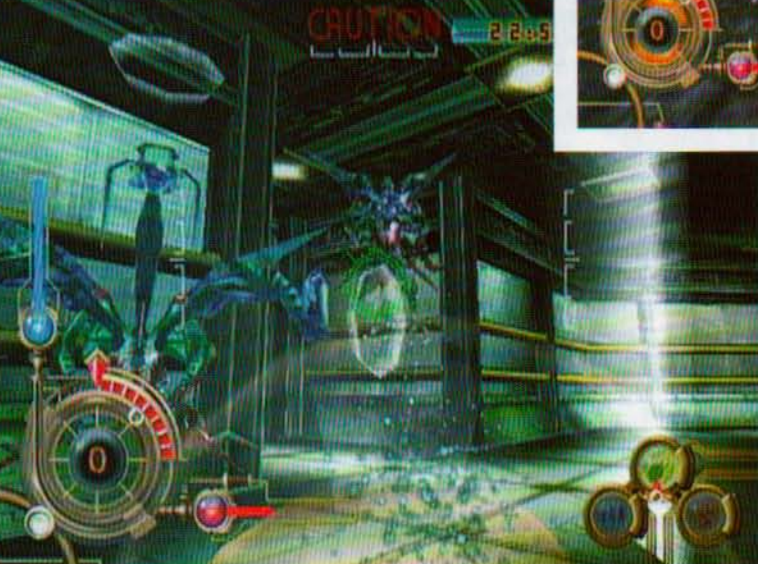






Kelly has an impressive lock-on ability that can take out several targets with one blast. Quick turns can be performed by moving the control stick and then clicking down





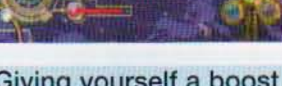
boosting and jumping, and chambers with interlocking rooms. There is a great deal of fun to be had in those levels which do not require multiple leaps of faith, while locking on to swarms of enemies and seeing them disappear into splashes of goo can be a thrilling experience.

In terms of presentation, *GunValkyrie* is excellent, with some wonderfully atmospheric effects and a style which cleverly blends Victoriana with high-tech gadgetry. At times the music and effects produce a dream-like quality which can be absolutely captivating. The game is difficult, yes, but initial frustration can be overcome by mastering a complicated control system. *GunValkyrie* offers hardcore gaming at its very best, and its very worst.

Edge rating: Five out of ten



The boost gauge (indicated by the red arc) depletes very quickly, so it's important to reach platforms with one quick thrust (left)

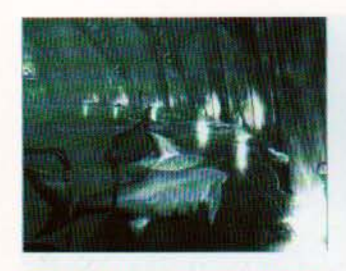


Giving yourself a boost

The player can choose either Saburouta or Kelly to tackle each mission. While Saburouta has greater firepower he cannot fire multiple shots. Both warriors can, however, become very agile once the basic controls are mastered. Combining side-rolls with forward and backward thrusts will result in a boost combo – a reaction which temporarily raises the boost gauge. Good boosting will reduce some of the game's inherent frustrations, but not all.

Biohazard

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥7,000 (includes memory card) (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), summer (UK)**







Many scenes will be familiar to fans of the series, but most have received a makeover to increase their dramatic potential, and induce a feeling of panic

"Capcom has truly performed a miracle with this game," gushed **Edge**, six years ago this month. "Doubtless the reader will already be glancing agape at the screenshots that accompany this review and, let it be known, what you see is what you get," we wrote. "*Resident Evil* is *Alone in the Dark* directed by George A Romero with the design sensibilities of *Myst*." And the sentiments remain true of the GameCube remake (except the bit about *Myst* perhaps).

The game does look amazing, and the claustrophobic B-movie philosophy is preserved and updated. But when *Biohazard* first arrived on PlayStation it was paradigmatic. On GameCube it isn't. Nevertheless, the breathtaking technical achievement evident in screenshots allows for an exhilarating accentuation of the sense of dread and fear that remain at the heart of the *Biohazard* experience.

After a number of sequels that have successively diluted the original sensation of psychological dread by placing a greater emphasis on action, *Biohazard* on GameCube unsurprisingly marks a return to the enclosed spaces and exquisitely excruciating panic of the first chapter in the series. It's a shame that certain niggles haven't been corrected though. Poor collision detection produces an unwieldy sense of control, despite an input system that has proved its worth in Capcom's other survival horror titles. In addition, limited ammo and unforgiving combat conspire to dramatically increase a sense of tension, but the thoughtless use of resources can render a



The basic hallmarks of the series remain intact: a palpable sense of claustrophobic fear, bursts of visceral action, breathtaking visuals, heart-stopping set-pieces and an incredibly atmospheric score

For gamers too young to remember the original survival horror, GameCube Biohazard will quickly establish itself as the definitive version



Jill and Chris pursue different paths through the game, encountering different sidekicks and cut-scenes

staccato, interruptive tempo to a game that's more enjoyable as a seamless whole.

Or as **Edge** put it in 1996, "It can be all too easy to loose off a couple of rash shots in an awkward position only to find yourself with your trousers round your ankles, your neck in the mouth of a flesh-eating ghoul, and your last save point about six rabid wolves and a snake away." Except **Edge** hasn't spotted any rabid wolves in the remake.

All things considered though, these are minor gripes. In terms of structure, the game itself is broadly similar to the PlayStation original. Once again, two playable STARS members, Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield, possess unique advantages and disadvantages, and pursue different paths through a mansion on the outskirts of Racoon City while investigating reports of cannibalism. Some puzzles remain intact from the original, some are reworked, and others are entirely original. Again, they verge from the sublime to the ridiculous.

The major differences introduced in this new version are that certain areas are expanded, providing wholly new play sequences, and various set-pieces are enhanced, with their dramatic scope enlarged. But above all, the signature impression of unremitting tension and anxiety is heightened; first, by the fact that the game is slightly more unforgiving than the original, and second, by inspired technical artistry. Zombies are tougher, necessitating the introduction of defence items – one-shot knives and stun guns that can extricate your character from a zombie's embrace. Nuances of lighting and shadows, as well as murky reflections at the periphery of your vision and ever more dramatic camera angles combine with an enhanced soundtrack to instil a permanent sense of unease. And once again, expectations of safety and security are toyed with, by the introduction of surprise attacks and false alarms.

For gamers that are too young to remember the original survival horror, GameCube *Biohazard* will quickly establish itself as the definitive version. And for owners of the original, it offers more than nostalgic appeal. It's not the miracle that the original was. But it's not far short.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Previously in E106







Although the game does feature entirely new areas, the structure is broadly similar to the original, PlayStation incarnation of the series









Unlike the more forgiving original, dispatched zombies return to life in a faster and stronger form unless their bodies are disposed of

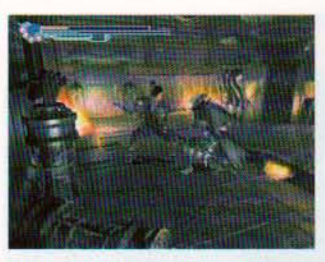


Action replay

In a way, the GameCube version of *Biohazard* is a distillation of Capcom's attitude towards replayability. The company's survival horror titles have all included a number of unlockable costumes, weapons and play modes to reinvigorate them after completion. This version of *Biohazard* is no different, featuring several extras that add a novel twist to already experienced proceedings. Which somehow seems appropriate given that it's a title that provides a broadly similar experience to that offered on PlayStation six years ago, but with the benefit of several additions to keep the experience feeling fresh and new.

Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), summer (UK)**







Although some settings will be familiar to those who have played the prequel, *Onimusha 2* encompasses a much greater number of environments

The inevitable sequel to Capcom's supernatural horror period piece demonstrates the company's unstinting devotion to treading familiar ground. As with all forays into the genre, resurrection proves to be a recurring motif: undead nemesis Oda Nobunaga makes his return; Yusaka Matsuda, the late Japanese actor, has been digitally reborn as the game's protagonist, Yagyu Jubei; and once again some of the action takes place in Inabayama Keep. Most significantly, gameplay fundamentals can be dated back to the very first episodes in Capcom's survival horror onslaught – which themselves owe a sizeable debt to the earliest graphical adventure games. However, *Onimusha 2* is a real case of new wine in old bottles.

Taking its immediate predecessor as a starting point, it strips away every superfluous design element, removes every redundant platforming section and refines almost every unwieldy play structure. Thus the essential spirit of the original is preserved, maintaining a pleasing balance between two extremes: of the conundrum-heavy play of the *Biohazard* series on one hand and the more unadulterated action bias of *Devil May Cry* on the other. Prerendered backdrops might hark back to a pre-*Code: Veronica* era, but they're far more beautiful and deeply atmospheric. Frequent cut-scenes might irritate die-hard ludologists for interrupting the seamless flow of the game, but high quality motion capture and disciplined editing ensure that animated interludes provide a captivating framework for the action. In short, the slick formula of the original is articulated with much more panache and on a much grander scale.



The monstrous ecology of *Onimusha 2* expands the range of opponents found in the original. Undead swordsmen and ogres are joined by reptilian assailants, as well as a host of unconventional beasties

In short, the slick formula of the original is articulated with much more panache and on a much grander scale in Onimusha 2



The preponderance of boss encounters is one of the game's few weaknesses, and won't be to everyone's tastes

The basic mechanics of combat are essentially unchanged, with the targeting lock and basic combo systems tightened up, and though it's not quite as immediate as *Devil May Cry*, it's certainly a fluid and visceral experience. Four different types of demon souls can still be absorbed during and after combat, providing a variety of power-ups. As with *Genma Onimusha*, these now include souls that can be used to transform into a supercharged ogre state for a limited time, layering a welcome level of tactical complexity on top of that provided by counterattacks and a sensible selection of weaponry. Indeed weapons, and now armour, can be charged up using souls, enabling access to more powerful magic attacks and, significantly, unexplored areas.

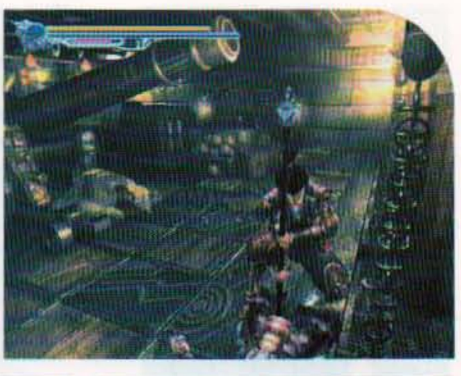
The fundamentals remain the same, but *Onimusha 2* far exceeds the scope of its predecessor and not just in terms of the narrative, though this is more epic in its reach. Environments are also more expansive and more numerous, and there's a richer cast of secondary characters. This secondary cast adds a whole new dimension in the shape of a recruitment sub-game with shades of Kurosawa's 'Seven Samurai'. By trading items with certain characters, Jubei can win their aid at key moments during the game. What's more, influencing them with gifts can also unlock them as playable characters during other sections of the game, creating multiple routes through the game and extending its lifespan.

Of course, the game isn't without fault. It continues Capcom's apparent obsession with boss encounters, for example, resulting in several interruptions to the flow of the game, and the narrative transition from conventional demonology in the early part of the game towards steampunk technology at the very end isn't particularly welcome. And another sequel is inevitable, judging by the inclusion of a trailer for *Onimusha 3*. But if the eventual next episode in the series demonstrates anywhere near as much wit and invention as *Onimusha 2*, there's almost no doubt that it will vindicate Capcom's sequel-heavy release ethos.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten





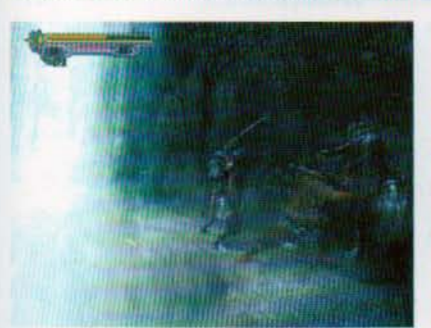




Combat, though refined, remains largely unchanged. Once again, magical attacks are of vital importance in overcoming opponents









The major differences between this and the first *Onimusha* is that there are several additional playable characters (above) and it's possible to transform into an ogre (left)



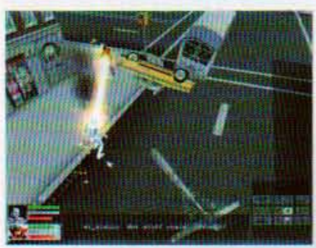
Russian roulette

Production values throughout *Onimusha 2* are extremely high. Cut-scenes are polished, environments are meticulous, and character animation is exceptional. Capcom boasts that "a host of other entertainment professionals with expertise in writing, special effects and motion capture" has worked on the title, and it really shows. Among these big names are Japanese film director, Keita Amemiya, and J-Rocker, Tomoyasu Hotei, who provides the theme music, 'Russian Roulette'. Despite his involvement though, **Edge** can't help feeling that his music video, which prefaces the game proper, is slightly inappropriate.

Freedom Force

Format: **PC** Publisher: **EA/Crave Entertainment** Developer: **Irrational Games** Price: **£30** Release: **May 3**





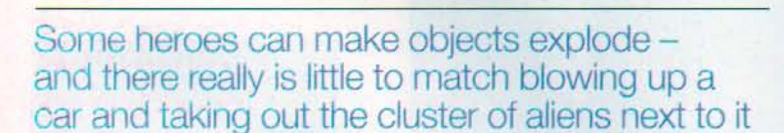


Part of the quest to stop Nuclear Winter takes place on an aircraft carrier (top) but most missions are based in Patriot City

For a medium that often seeks inspiration from other forms, it's surprising just how few games have appropriated comic book superheroics. Fewer still have actually managed to nail their essence, instead using superheroes to brand beat 'em ups or arcade adventures. With *Freedom Force*, Irrational is clearly trying to 'do' comics the right way, specifically in the style of the Silver Age of comics in the 1960s.

From the opening 'Origin of...' sequence that beautifully apes the artwork of Jack Kirby, *Freedom Force* carefully treads a line between loving tribute and knowing pastiche. Indeed, the tactical RPG approach taken by Irrational seems well suited to the constraints and demands of comic book conventions. The game proper unfolds in realtime but uses an 'action pause' mode akin to that in *Baldur's Gate*, making it easy to control up to four superheroes at once.

Early missions introduce the characters that founded Freedom Force – Minuteman, Mentor, Man-Bot and El Diablo – and later ones pitch your growing team against ever-more mighty supervillains. Crucial to this progression are the experience points earned on previous missions, which can be spent improving each character's special powers, as well as adding new ones, and prestige points, which are used to recruit new heroes to the team.



Some heroes can make objects explode – and there really is little to match blowing up a car and taking out the cluster of aliens next to it



Attempting to close an alien portal in Patriot City. Most levels have one mission-critical character – in this case, it's Alchemiss – who you must use and keep from being taken out by the enemy

Where *Freedom Force* differs from typical RPGs is in the sheer variety of ways it can be played. That's not to say it's an open, non-linear experience – the tight campaign storyline prevents that. No, the variety comes from the range of subtly different powers. From ranged and mêlée attacks, to passive and active defences, and incorporating exotica, such as teleportation and hexing, *Freedom Force*'s myriad powers are a delight. There doesn't seem to be any right or wrong combination of characters to use in a team, making it much more a matter of personal preference who you use. It's a satisfying degree of, well, freedom, but more on this later.

Deformable landscapes further extend the scope. Most heroes can uproot traffic lights or telegraph poles and club villains with them. Stronger ones can even pick up cars and other objects and throw them at enemies. Buildings can also be destroyed, causing any foe lurking on the roof to plummet painfully to the ground. Most entertaining of all, some heroes can acquire the power to make inanimate objects explode – and there really is little to match the satisfaction of blowing up a car and taking out the cluster of aliens next to it.

But it's not all super with the heroes. For a start, the game camera has problems coping with the tall buildings and tight alleyways of Patriot City. This means that you can't quickly or easily see what's going on without zooming in to make the buildings transparent. However, being quick or easy doesn't really matter as you can action pause the game at any time. This reveals another problem. While the mechanics of the action pause system allow you to handle four characters at once, they also strip away a fair amount of urgency from the game. It's more approachable but less dynamic as a result, especially when you can save at any time.

Now, back to that feeling of freedom. There's a nagging suspicion that it's somehow down to the thug-like AI of your enemies. Almost all the grunts of whichever supervillain you're tackling attack on sight with little guile, never holding back and very rarely retreating. More disappointing, your nemeses' only advantage seems to be the occasional special power and a big stack of hit points. Your heroes may be a team but the villains never act convincingly as one. Isn't there an old adage in



When giant ants attack, the Freedom Force recruit one-time villain The Ant, and venture into an underground warren

















Freedom Force proudly draws on its comic book heritage, right from the boldest strokes of the story down to the tiny speech effect bubbles that accompany every hit. It's even got an annoyingly keen teenage hero, the forever perky Liberty Lad (left), but you don't have to use him if you don't want to

drama about heroes only being as a good as their villains?

These are by no means fatal blows but they do dent *Freedom Force*'s aura of invulnerability and can make an otherwise hugely entertaining game feel ponderous, deliberate and routine. Overriding all this, though, is the gusto with which its excellent superhero yarn is lovingly spun and the sheer pleasure to be had in discovering new heroes and powers, experimenting with different teams and toying with the character creation kit. *Freedom Force* is tailor-made for expansions and sequels, and if they can remedy its shortcomings then gamers, as well as comic book fans, could be in for something special.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

The X factor

Set in 1962, *Freedom Force* winningly reflects the comics of the era, with no cliché left unturned – it's all thinly veiled nuclear paranoia and sublimated sexual frustration. Wholeheartedly stealing the X-Men's shtick, all the heroes in *Freedom Force* derive their powers from the radioactive element, Energy X, and it's explained in the Marvel-ous cut-scenes which serve as a reward for discovering new characters.

Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast

Format: **PC** Publisher: **LucasArts** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**102

After recent disappointments, preview footage of *Jedi Outcast* suggested that it could be the title that marked a return to the halcyon days of LucasArts; a return to the triumphant era of *TIE Fighter*, or indeed the original *Dark Forces* and *Jedi Knight*. But after extended play, *Jedi Knight II* falls short. Way short. Partly because of the increasing maladaptation of the PC firstperson shooter genre, but also because the game fails to deliver the basic constituents of a satisfying videogame. Handling is lethargic and the game universe is inconsistent.

On the positive side, the architectural grandeur of the game's predecessors has been maintained; character models are the most convincing in-game evocation of 'Star Wars' authenticity; and using Force powers can be immensely satisfying. But the title suffers from the need to pander to an increasingly niche audience. The game is heavily quicksave-centric, with puzzles and problems that almost require character death to be overcome, resulting in an abrupt, inconsistent rhythm. Enemy AI seems to have evolved from that of multiplayer bots, which means that it's simple and presents an adequate challenge, but rapidly strafing stormtroopers are hardly authentic. And an underwhelming arsenal is largely inaccurate – to compensate for the over-easy keyboard and mouse input mechanism.

More problematic is the clumsy design throughout. The bilinear, customisable accumulation of Force powers featured in *Jedi Knight* has been thrown out in favour of more undemanding progress. Force powers are under-utilised and inconsistently applied; puzzles are overwrought and barely signposted; and set pieces, particularly an anti-gravity section, suffer from jerky animations and a poorly thought out loss of control. And lightsaber combat is unintuitive and maladroit, requiring an overuse of the *Max Payne*-inspired Force Speed ability. Even then, there's no sense that this is a more elegant weapon than a blaster.

A tacked on multiplayer mode is similarly beset by clumsy controls, with heavy handed reliance on lightsaber combat undermining one or two well-designed arenas, though competition against real opponents does overcome some of the shortcomings of the singleplayer game. But if you're expecting a return to form from LucasArts, this isn't the game you're looking for.

Edge rating: Four out of ten



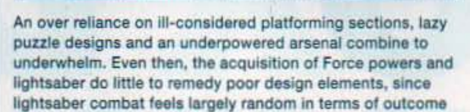


There's something spectacularly inappropriate about the inconsequential availability of Force powers such as Force Lightning and Force Grip









An over reliance on ill-considered platforming sections, lazy puzzle designs and an underpowered arsenal combine to underwhelm. Even then, the acquisition of Force powers and lightsaber do little to remedy poor design elements, since lightsaber combat feels largely random in terms of outcome



Cut it out

Despite reasonable voice acting – particularly from Billy Dee Williams, who played Lando Calrissian in 'The Empire Strikes Back' and 'Return of the Jedi' – *Jedi Outcast*'s cut-scenes fall massively short of the cinematic composition of the 'Star Wars' movies. The use of in-game models and ill-disciplined editing conspire to produce some of the most turgid cut-scene sequences of recent years. There are too many, they're too long, and they're backed up by an uninspired and badly scripted plot. Compared to the technical brilliance of the cut-scenes featured in the likes of *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Onimusha 2*, they're primitive and insipid.

Animal Leader

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

As consoles reach a stage where they're genuinely offering game creators enough leeway to provide something approaching realism, the designers find themselves at an artistic junction. It turns out that appreciable beauty isn't created by high polygon counts after all, but by imagination. And, with this in mind, maybe it's time to go back to the first principles of 3D, as evangelised by the N64. Simple shapes, no texturing, a superficially plain aesthetic disguised by animation and creativity. Flat is the new curved. Ugly is the new beautiful.

Regardless of whether *Animal Leader*'s retro cubic look has been deliberately styled as simplistic, or whether it's a quick 'n' easy update of a game originally intended to fit inside N64 architecture to help Nintendo stick to its 'in-house game a month' promise, the absolute minimalism here is likely to leave most Cube owners feeling short-changed. Still, at least it allows easy interpretation of the game's premise for those not schooled in kanji and kana. You are an animal, and your body is a cube. Your limbs are flat square cuboids, number from one to six and, in general, attach to your body along a vertex.

And that's how all the other rival animals are made, too. Attacking them, achieved through a combination of Z-lock circling and one-button rushes, leaves them stunned. Survival of the fittest dictates your next move; tearing off one of their limbs, and consuming it, which gives one of *your* limbs *their* colour. Each of the five colours has different attributes – it makes your persona quicker, more aggressive, and so on, and once all your limbs are shaded uniformly, you change form to match your prey. That gives you a different arrangement of limbs, and a menu details how many of the sixty possible shapes you've seen. *Animal Leader*'s long term objective, as with so many post-*Pokémon* games, is to see them all.

But the simple premise and rudimentary combat mechanics don't conceal any subtlety, or any longevity above the desire to witness every possible mutation. There's little here beyond the cuteness. The creatures are logical caricatures and suit the evolutionary ethic, but the small, flat, angular arenas they inhabit are unattractive, and while the scenery might superficially fit the boxy stylings of its populace, it's too stupid, too sterile. It lacks exactly what **Edge** thought it might initially provide. It lacks imagination.

Edge rating: Four out of ten













When the genetic mutations reach their natural termination point, the player will find themselves in a rainbow-strewn heaven surrounded by many of the animals they've killed en route. It's a creative way of softening the violent nature of the game, and made especially sweet by the tacked-on golden wire halos



Newborn animals start off in nests, which they quickly outgrow. Each panel-limb formation gives the animals a different style of movement



Petit mort

Entering one of the incongruous tunnels of love gives you a chance to mate, which – like in all good relationships – ends with your corpse sheltering a child who looks just like you, but has an extra limb. You take on the role of that child, who, if you're to complete the game, will prove that aggression is a familial trait by attacking the first animal he meets and ripping its panel-based legs off. While the violence is anything but realistic, sensitive viewers may blanche at the ribbons of purple that spurt from each kill.

Crash

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Rage** Developer: **In-house (Studio Sheffield)** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**102

Crash is as subtle as a punch in the face. Forget classic racing lines, cunning slipstream manoeuvres, or fiddly tune-up sessions: this is *Destruction Derby* for 2002, with body panels flying hither and thither as tonnes of shiny steel collide every which way at gut-curdling velocities.

It's not immediately apparent that this is such an earthy game, however, because everything is rendered with an almost cartoony vibe: skyscrapers look like children's cardboard models, spectators appear to be mere static cutouts, and the cars themselves are straight out of a Hot Wheels playset. But *Crash* isn't without visual flair, and that's down to speed – with the more muscular vehicles, the action moves so quickly that you can blink and miss a collision.

Arcade mode offers the expected entry to the action, but Career is where the oneplayer experience comes into its own as you complete challenges (they're varied: face off against seven other drivers in deathmatch-style scenarios; play 'tag' and be both the pursued and the pursuer; push barrels into targets in more sedate stages against the clock, etc), unlocking vehicles and locations.

The latter represent one of *Crash*'s strengths, as developer Rage has gone to town in mustering up a varied bundle of environments. While some sit firmly in the realm of the cliché (beware the snowbound level), others, such as Bear Pit (which offers an American football stadium, replete with bonus ramps running up to the goalposts) show genuine spark. Along with bowl-style arenas, there's a selection of traditional tarmac racing circuits which, although not playing as even-mindedly as their equivalents in other titles, serve well to mix things up.

But the cars themselves are the focus, and they're a disparate bunch, ranging from '50s-style cruisers (super-tough but slow) to sexier sports cars (quick off the mark but lacking in body strength). New models are unlocked as you play, but it's disappointing that you're not able to customise as you go; instead, your options are set in concrete.

Driving against CPU opponents isn't *Crash*'s forte (bots tend to struggle with reversing out of trouble), and its frequent loading bouts won't win it fans, but with friends it can be engrossing, especially with team battles. If Microsoft is to win over the post-pub gaming crowd, this is the sort of game that'll lead the charge.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

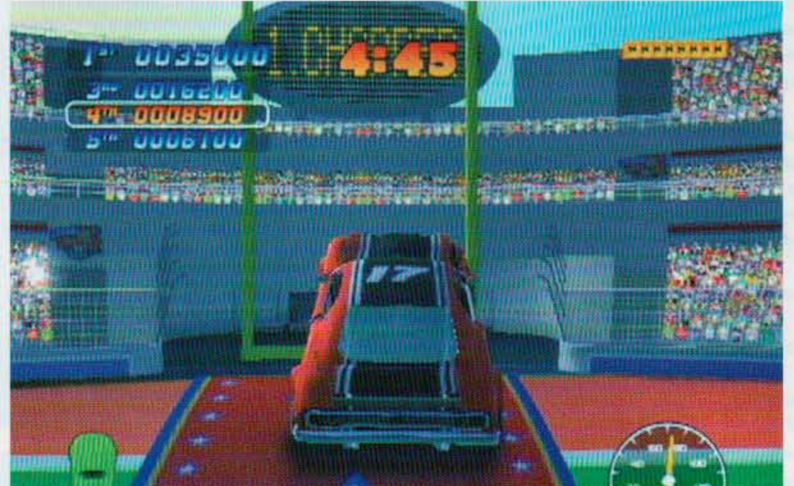








Icy conditions (top right) lead to predictable consequences. Cars from the '50s (left) prove resilient but ultimately frustrating to drive



On certain levels you don't have to eliminate every opponent: you're simply looking to be the first to reach a certain score. Bearing in mind you don't have to smash into things to rack up points, you can spend your time pulling off outrageous manoeuvres such as this 'field goal' in the Bear Pit arena



Jumping flash

Although *Crash* is fundamentally all about smashing cars into other cars, the game also includes a selection of set-pieces featuring more oddball pursuits. For example, you're immediately able to enter a bus-jumping section, where judicious use of your nitros sees you clearing up to ten public-transport vehicles. More frustrating is another challenge, which charges you with hitting crates while avoiding bowling pins, against a strict time limit. These peripheral sections add tremendously to the singleplayer *Crash* experience.

Super Trucks

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Jester Interactive** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**108









If the race marshals think you're being too aggressive they bring out the black flags, which incurs an automatic rolling time penalty. Bits of debris litter the race track – it's a nice touch, but it hardly makes up for the incredibly tedious racing

Sometimes a game comes along that does nothing particularly wrong. There are no major technical flaws, the visuals are solid, the physics competent and the overall package is proficient. *Super Trucks* is one such game. Like a Stepford wife it will serve your needs and massage your ego (surely it was worth £40?). But be warned: it is a thoroughly soulless experience. After an hour you'll still be looking for the vital spark of imagination that makes a game fun. After two, you will have realised that it's not to be found.

The main problem lies with the sluggish handling of the vehicles and poor conveyance of speed. Hurtling down a racing track in a 3,000lb 'super' truck should be a thrilling experience. Unfortunately, the framerate clips along at a stately pace lending the game an air of tranquillity rather than excitement. Rainy weather, damage effects and black flags threaten to elevate the game to the mediocre, but it's all very bland and smacks of conservative game design.

All the expected modes are present: Arcade, Championship and Multiplayer, but the mechanics – which lack any kind of sophistication – induce torpor not passion. Not particularly super at all.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

Nezmix

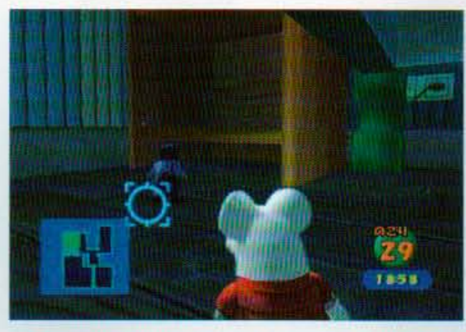
Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Media Vision** Price: **¥7,800 (£41)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E**104

Heavily promoted for the Japanese Xbox launch, *Nezmix* emerged as a commercial failure. It's easy to understand why. The player leads a gang of mice around a sequence of five locations, each containing a number of rooms. The rooms conceal a handful of colour-coded enemy mice who must be found in order to proceed. The player's mice can only move through the rooms via a network of rigidly defined pathways, with control broadly confined to moving forwards and backwards along them. Junctions afford a choice of route, but since the objective is to spot all your enemies, every pathway must be taken at some point, thus the implied non-linearity is utterly superficial.

There's no freedom in *Nezmix*, and little interaction. Sometimes the mice involve themselves with the scenery – urns can be examined, or objects that block routes can be moved aside – but it's not obvious what can be manipulated and what can't. The locations are expertly realised with stunning texturing, and the much-vaunted fur shading, while muted, is impressive. The game, though, is dire and, as Microsoft found in Japan, no amount of cute styling and soft toy-based promotion will persuade people otherwise.

Edge rating: Two out of ten









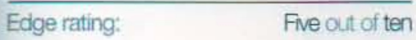
Once you've spotted all of one particular colour, the action moves to a quick freeform arcade rumble between your gang and the enemy, with you directly controlling the leader, Apollo, but able to indirectly control the rest of your group with an active pause

Doshin the Giant

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

An update of an N64 DD game, *Doshin* is pre-school *Black & White*, kid-safe corners drawn with bright-coloured crayons. The player controls the eponymous character, and wanders across a map inhabited by four races of humans. Doshin can deform the landscapes to satisfy the villagers; by pulling the ground upwards he creates mountains, while dragging it down creates lakes. Lush, level terrain means villagers will love you and make the village bigger. Create enough love and you'll grow bigger too. Raise a village to a certain size, and they'll build you a monument.

The aim is to build all 16 monuments, which requires some self-made villager exchange schemes, and limited balancing of time and resources. Not much, though, since there's no time restriction, leaving the player free to enjoy the crude, placid beauty of the environments. There are opportunities for mild hysteria; occasional natural disasters impede your progress, and those with an evil streak can create panic by spending their time as Jashin, Doshin's devilish alter ego who grows in stature with the villagers' fear. But really, this is a comedown game, a sleepy sandbox, and one that offers gentle, if limited, entertainment.



Edge rating: Five out of ten









The villagers love for Doshin manifests itself in the form of monuments, one of which is shown above. Also visible is Doshin's 'outy' belly button, a biological quirk easily misinterpreted by dirty minds

Smashing Drive

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **Point of View** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**





Vibrant colours, exploding vehicles, scattering pedestrians – must be fun? Wrong. *Smashing Drive* has all the hallmarks of *Crazy Taxi*, but without any of the refinement and sense of freedom





The arcade version was hardly inspiring and the conversion to the GameCube has brought little else other than a twoplayer mode. Indeed, its inclusion in these pages is mainly due to the dearth of releases coming out on Nintendo's system. *Biohazard* aside, it's been a paltry few months for GameCube owners.

The premise is similar to that of *Crazy Taxi* – money must be earned by racing headlong through New York traffic while avoiding a multitude of obstacles. However, the execution is less polished and the level design more restrained. Rather than offering an open section of, say, Manhattan to explore, the player must follow very prescribed routes to reach checkpoints. Although hidden paths can be discovered – by hitting ramps or smashing through buildings – they fail to eliminate the crushing sense of linearity. Indeed, this is checkpoint racing at its worst because if certain hidden routes are not used it is impossible to reach the goal.

The handling is comically basic (even for an arcade game) and the power-ups, which include turbo boosts, blast-horns and glider wings, add little to a game lacking in imagination. It's mildly entertaining but *Smashing Drive* has been done better before.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

Deus Ex

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Ion Storm Austin** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**









While the resolution is lower than most PC players will be used to, the comfort of big screen decision-making is a fair trade. The control is slightly sluggish but the inventory revamp is neat, and as good a system as PS2 owners could have hoped for

No straight port, the developer's insistence that its vision run properly on a format it wasn't designed for has caused delay after delay to the release of *Deus Ex* on PS2. And even so, sometimes the illusion jars. The instant-hit ballistics of enemy weapons don't suit the slow turning speed of the DualShock2; the low-lev texturing will make *Halo*'s tourists wish they were back on the ringworld; and regular loading times spoil the coherence. But all problems melt away in the face of the game mechanic. The PC version never astounded people with superficialities. It was the way it motivated them; the way it provided players with choice.

That remains. From pathways in JC Denton's conversations, which affect the reactions of NPCs late to the RPG-style upgrading of his character model, to the non-stop shoot/stealth philosophy switching, to th different routes through the buildings; everything here offers a decision. It's all framed inside a story that, whe it works, offers a stark moral framework contextualisin every choice. Traditional FPS fans may find it lacks pace and there are technological limitations, because it's still a PC game at its core – but above all, there is the freedom, and that's why it excels.

Edge rating: Eight out of te

Sled Storm

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

The goofy voiceovers, the trademarked trackside furniture, the combo-powered boost-meter: *Sled Storm* takes its cues directly from EA's snowboard romp, *SSX*. However, the sleds are feeble and look boxy, and their riders are faded duplicates of their *SSX* equivalents. Consequently, tricks tend to feel leaden and laboured and, even with their runners firmly on snow (or volcanic rock, or picturesque alpine rooftops), the sleds handle unconvincingly. There's no sense of interaction with the surface – a factor which the game's below-par spot-effects and unfortunate hole-in-wall glitches only serve to exaggerate.

SSX's Nintendo-style championship structure has been exchanged for a less compelling cut-and-come-again, item-unlocking format. The destructible scenery, sprawling, fantastical, action-packed tracks and dizzying choice of shortcuts all feel like welcome enhancements, but hardly signify a new game. It's not as satisfying or as slick as *SSX* and not distinctive enough to feel like a meaningful alternative, either. Not a total wipeout, by any means – but the Big franchise's boost bar is running dangerously low on juice.

Edge rating: Five out of ten







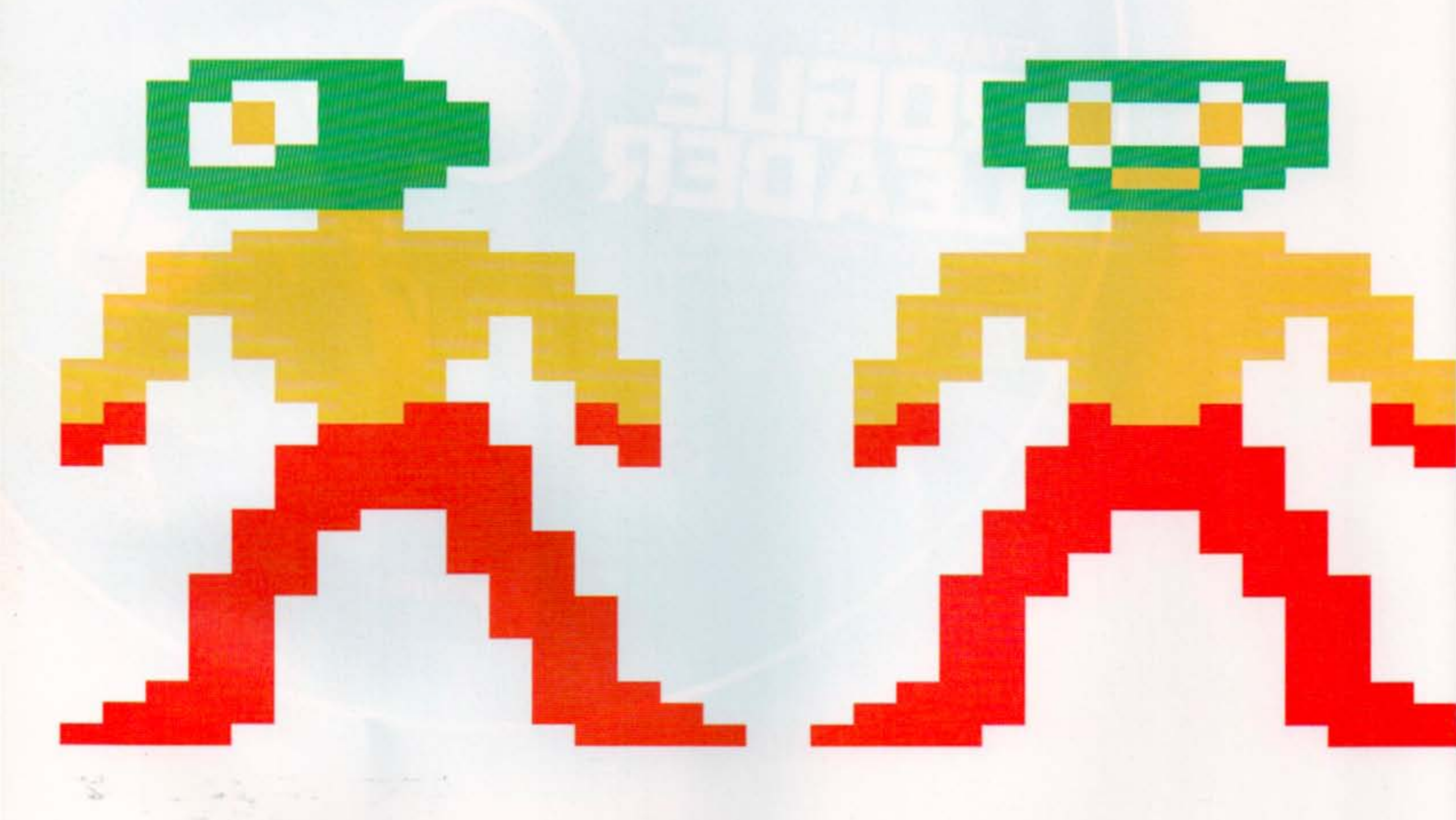


Anyone who's ever played *SSX* will recognise the technicolour snow and improbable inclines immediately. *Sled Storm*'s environments are shiny and spectacular; the experience less so

The making of…

Repton

Many developers have attempted to create a reptilian videogame icon, but none ever proved as recognisable as Repton's eponymous hero. It had intricate level design and impeccable coding but an inhumane industry saw its young creator move on to pastures new

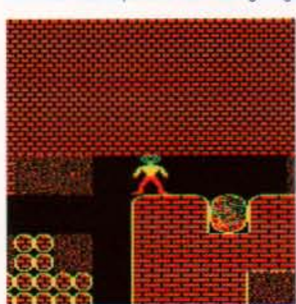


Original format: **BBC Micro**
Publisher: **Superior Software**
Developer: **Tim Tyler**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1985**

The summer of 1985 saw a game slip onto the market which was to become the start of a best-selling franchise and, after *Elite*, probably the best-known game ever to be released for the BBC family of home computers. Its 15-year-old creator earned telephone-number royalties from its publication, and that of its sequel. The game: *Repton*, the author: a now reflective **Tim Tyler**. Yet two years afterwards, before he'd even finished his A-levels, Tyler had sold the franchise to the name of his successful lizard and confessed that he was through with programming, calling it "too inhumane to make a career of."

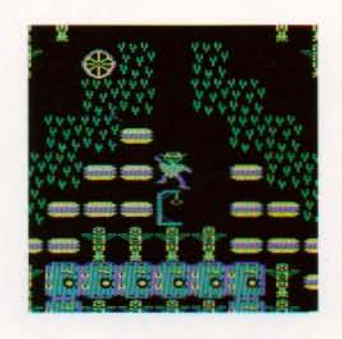
Repton the lizard is an instantly recognisable icon to any BBC or Electron owner, mainly because in sprite form he was enormous. His job

Repton made its creator one of the richest 15-year-olds in the country, and the Repton franchise was Superior's best-selling range



was to push boulders over ledges, escape from (or squash) bug-eyed monsters and pick up diamonds to escape from each level. Rocks, diamonds and monsters conspired to make the original game's 12 levels the most interesting and colourful challenge to hit the BBC's screen to date, and its rag-time music became the soundtrack to many childhoods: around 125,000 over its five-year peak. It was the player's intelligence and reflexes versus the level designer's cunning. "Can you finish *Repton*?" challenged the adverts.

Was it just a *Boulderdash* rip-off? It seems unfair given that Tyler (still) has never played *Boulderdash*. But he acknowledges that while having a similar idea in his head, he'd read a review of *Boulderdash* and declared it his inspiration. His confidence to program *Repton* was gained years earlier after reading an article in 'Which?' magazine, "I felt I'd read all I needed to know from that one article; I even started writing



programs before I'd bought a computer to try them on." Did he spend his time playing games? "Oh yes, that was its major purpose. I spent a lot of time playing *Frak*, *Zalaga*, *Arcadians*, *Defender*..." With a hectic playing schedule, it's not surprising that he wrote *Repton* in one busy month before submitting it to Superior. He had little in the way of tools: a home-brew pixel editor for the graphics, and maps were laid out on graph paper and entered as long strings of base 32. "I really had no idea what I was doing," Tyler states modestly.

After its successful release, **Richard Hanson**, managing director of Superior Software, was soon taking calls from customers asking when a sequel would be out. After three months of this, he asked Tyler the same question, and in another month, Tyler had produced *Repton 2*, which was like the first one, only



very much harder. Rather than have a number of discrete similarly-sized levels, *Repton 2* consisted of one giant level, with different areas linked by transporters and new features such as lethal spirits who could be shepherded into cages to unlock more diamonds. It is notable that the idea to include a password and map facility in the original *Repton* was down to Chris Payne, Superior's then marketing manager; Tyler got his way with *Repton 2*, and the game is still regarded as the thinking man's challenge within the emulation community, though many people found it too taxing at the time.

Diamonds are forever

Repton 2 kept players busy for six solid weeks after its release. Hanson knew it was six weeks because after this time, Superior began to receive phone calls to the effect that it was impossible to complete. The game refused to display the finishing sequence after dedicated players had collected every one of the 1500 odd diamonds. Due to a last-minute change ("never a good idea," Hanson stresses) Tyler had caused the game to count one more diamond than there actually was, and there was a smattering of disappointment among the people who'd discovered this. However a fixed version was issued, and it can't have made that much of a difference because *Repton 2* remains Superior Software's best-selling title to date.

Inevitably another sequel was planned, but Tyler's interest had waned. Although denying he had achieved any celebrity status, he admits that people stopped him in the street following *Repton*'s release ("I've no idea how they recognised me.") The money had made a big difference to the confidence of this 17-year-old, but no years of rock 'n' roll excess followed. He went to study maths, sold his franchise and

"tried to avoid the programming at college as much as possible."

Matthew Atkinson was picked by Superior to program the third *Repton* title in February 1986. Some design tweaks were made by Hanson and Payne so that Repton was required to find a time bomb before being allowed to finish a level, for instance. The level and password structure from the original game was brought back, and the spirits were brought over from *Repton 2*. Its major innovation, not just for *Repton* games, but for gaming in general was an integrated level and graphics editor. Did Hanson know it would be a success? "It's rare to be able to say in advance for sure, but with *Repton 3* I was 99.9 per cent, well, no, 100 per cent confident that it would be a major success."

Tyler remembers being critical of the game in general: particularly the jerky scrolling, "but that shows what I know I suppose." *Repton 3* was the best-selling game for the BBC from its launch in November 1986 until mid-February 1987. Then in-house, using the same tools they shipped with the game, Superior produced *Around The World in 40 Screens*, *The Life of Repton* and *Repton Thru Time* over the next 18 months, all selling spectacularly and running on the same code as the original. Certainly these were the first true game 'expansion packs', and more successful than the jaded mission discs that follow any moderately successful PC game. Hanson, a man with a canny commercial mind, was pensive when asked why they didn't just produce another couple, given their high returns. "I suppose I didn't want to be seen to be milking it."

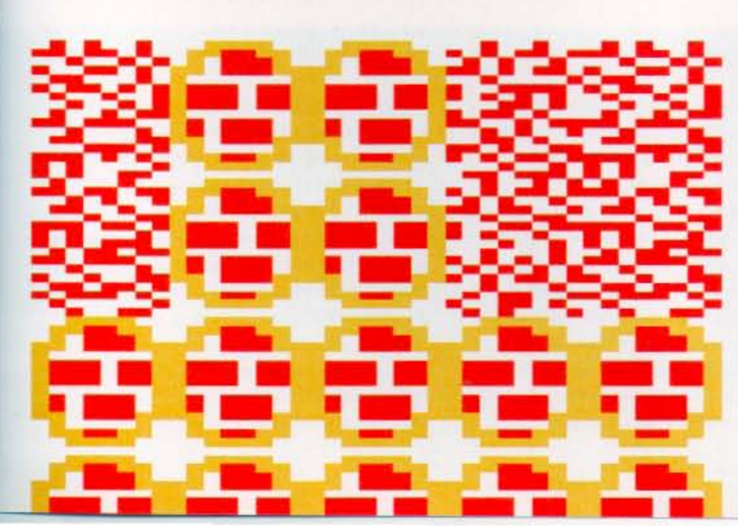
Great job

Did Atkinson know what an important game *Repton 3* was going to turn out to be? "No, it was just a great job. The call came out of the blue, they sat me down and offered it to me over lunch. They told me I wasn't the best programmer on their books, but I lived locally and worked well in a team." Indeed *Repton 3*'s design was a closely-monitored team effort, a rarity for 8bit games, and it took eight months to create as a result. Much of this time was spent backtracking on the decision to make the game and editor the same program, an ambitious 'WYSIWYG' game editor that never came about. However, the BBC Master's arrival in 1987 allowed this integration to be reinstated, and it was kept this way for the later Commodore 64 port.

More than just a commercial decision, putting a halt to further themed *Repton 3* releases was proof that Superior's catalogue had blossomed through the acceptance and variation of the *Repton* formula. When *Ravenskull* (another scrolling 2D puzzler) was submitted, Hanson was confident of its success. Also *Pipeline*, *Bone Cruncher* and *Clogger* were notable traders on the *Repton* formula, not to mention the swathes of similar type-in games that graced the pages of magazines at the time. This trend culminated (on the BBC at least) with Superior releasing *Repton Infinity*. A '*Repton* construction kit', the level and sprite editors were augmented with a compiled programming language which players could use to make their own *Repton*-type games. The game shipped with several surreal variants on the *Repton* formula, including one starring a bulldozer, and spawned a popular competition in 'The Micro User'.

Even now, the lizard is not dead, just resting. Tyler discovered Java ("Not perfect, but I never want to go back to machine code... even C++ is too low-level.") and made *Rockz*, an unfinished game in the style of *Repton 2*. Atkinson ("I miss machine code, people come out of college without a clue how to squeeze the last drop of speed from a machine") was just "amazed so many people are still interested after all this time." Hanson is quietly happy at *Repton*'s continuing success, and plans to release versions of the old games for the PC, mobile phone and Game Boy Advance platforms under the banner of Superior Software. "The Game Boy Advance is the first new platform in ages that's really made me sit up and take note... genuinely exciting." Who are we to argue?





RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 46, June 1997

Snake wasn't quite a household name back then. "It may seem strange," said **Edge**, black type resplendent on statement-making silver fifth colour, "that Konami should choose an obscure 1987 MSX2 game on which to base its most ambitious 32bit sequel to date…" Strange, maybe, but a four-page preview of the PlayStation classic detailed all the elements that ensured Konami's hero would make the gaming A-list.

His vulpine colleague Fox McCloud faired just as well; *Star Fox 64* opened the Testscreen section with a nine, followed by *Tobal 2* and an appraisal of the much-slipped *Dungeon Keeper*. **Edge** finished that review by asking where next for Molyneux, adding, "**Edge** just hopes gamers don't have to wait another three years to find out". They wouldn't. It turned out to be four.

In Out There, the consistently disparate Big in Japan dealt with porn, sex games and a new arcade machine from Sega. Aroma Club dispensed bottles of perfume with a smell that, in theory at least, was tailored to the player's mood. **Edge**'s thoughts on the future of olfactory entertainment? "Heaven knows what will happen if you're feeling shitty."



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"Dear Gloria, I'm a game-dude wizard!! But I'm undervalued. Help Me!" Climax's (presumably) fictional Ivor Nitch writes to an S&M-themed agony aunt (Gloria Snutcracker) in their full-page recruitment advert: "Come to Climax."

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"These are watches for the conscience, then, as well as the wrist." The new G-Shock G-Whale gets eco-friendly **Edge** all wet with excitement.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)
Star Fox 64 (N64; 9/10), *Tobal 2* (PS; 8/10), *Dungeon Keeper* (PC; 9/10), *Shining the Holy Ark* (Saturn; 6/10), *ISS Pro* (PS; 9/10), *Vandal Hearts* (PS; 8/10), *Outlaws* (PC; 5/10), *Independence Day* (Saturn; 3/10), *Carmageddon* (PC; 6/10), *IQ* (PS; 7/10), *Tail of the Sun* (PS; 5/10)



1



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5



6

1. *Zelda 64* "could take advantage of 64DD's modem connextion" 2. LucasArts' FPS *Outlaws* deserved a higher mark, perhaps 3. Dr Mark Griffiths, debunking the theory that videogames cause violence 4. Melbourne House strive to get ahead 5. **Edge**'s first proper look at *Metal Gear Solid* 6. *Star Fox 64*, complete with 'bizarre gadget' Jolt Pack

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Matt Sansam, producer of Warhammer Online, remembers fighting real people





Meridian 59 was one of the first online RPGs to feature graphics rather than simply text

I have been playing online games, and RPGs in particular, for as long as I can remember and during the early '90s a large proportion of my online time was spent playing text-based MUDS.

The simple fact is that there was something truly addictive about playing in an environment populated by real people. You could talk to them, trade with them even kill them and suddenly towards the end of 1996 there was something new – *Meridian 59*. One of the first graphics-based online RPGs. For the first time you could actually see the other players as they moved around the towns, see the monsters you had to fight, even climb cliffs and look over landscapes. Everything had a scale and a context they never had with text-based games. *Meridian 59* was an online environment and not just fast scrolling text.

The graphics weren't great – the engine was similar to *Doom* with everything displayed as sprites. The lag on my expensive 28.8 modem was terrible and loading times between zones left something to be desired, but there was still something special about this game. Countless nights were spent trading, fighting and exploring.

Since then I've played lots of other MMORPGs – *UO*, *AC*, *AO*, *DAoC* and, of course, *EQ* but *Meridian 59* will always be a favourite.

FAQ

Ian Baverstock

new business development director, Kuju Entertainment



Although Kuju Entertainment is better known for simulation titles, such as the magisterial *Microsoft Train Simulator*, titles like *Reign of Fire* show significant potential, and the company has seen considerable success in developing titles for mobile phone gaming.

What was the first videogame you played?
Space Invaders.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
Sinclair ZX80.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
A very simple 'one enemy' *Space Invaders* clone.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
Programmer/co-founder at Simis, working on Interdictor.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Either *Age of Empires* or *Populous*, because they were great games that offered tremendous replayability.

What was the last game you played and what did you think of it?
Red Faction. A very nice FPS that was non-linear enough to remind me to use more than just the quicksave option.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
An average of about ten.

Which Website do you most regularly visit?
Railtrack's. I really must get round to picking up a paper timetable.

What game would you most like to have worked on?
Populous. It was being written a few miles up the road from me while I was wasting that part of life designing weapons that probably still haven't entered service yet.

Of all the games you've been involved with in the past, what's your favourite and why?
The last game we shipped is always the greatest and the next one we're going to ship is always the most exciting. If you haven't got that attitude then you couldn't do the job.

What stage are your current projects at?
Everything from "still writing the concept" to "oh shit, are we really submitting this that soon?"

What aspect of it do you think will impress players the most?
The next PlayStation2 game we're releasing is just a great blast – but it isn't announced yet so that's all I can say.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
Games of the right size, genre and price to attract the huge number of people who don't play games. I'm sure a lot of them would play videogames if they didn't demand so much commitment from the player – which is exactly what the hardcore wants of course.

What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
Handheld Java devices with colour screens, decent game buttons, Internet connectivity and an inbuilt MP3 player.

Do you have any thoughts on mobile phone gaming?
Yes. I think it will be big and offer more new genres and ideas than any other area of games for the next few years.

Videogames: Art or Entertainment? (Discuss)
Both, but primarily entertainment. Good art can be a big contribution to entertaining people, but it's the entertainment factor that consumers are seeking and last time I looked, we were (mostly) all working in commercial organisations producing stuff that primarily we want consumers to buy.

"The mainstream press simply don't cover games enough or with enough expertise given the size of the paying public"

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
No big preference, depends entirely on who I'm with. I usually prefer air hockey or table football with friends to arcade machines these days.

What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
Book: Iain Banks' 'Player Of Games.' Film: 'Monty Python's Life of Brian.' My musical tastes are notoriously crap and I'll listen to almost anything. Probably some collection of '80s singles that no one born after 1975 can believe were ever considered any good.

What disappoints you about the videogame industry?
The blatant disinterest in the actual games of some people.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
The people and the games (and the parties).

Whose work do you most admire?
No one individual really – games are all created by a team of people these days. Probably Naughty Dog en masse for its clarity of vision and ability to execute it.

What pleases/disappoints you about the way videogames are discussed in both the specialist and mainstream press?
The specialist press is often too concerned with feature lists; the classic example being network gaming in PC products. You have to include it or you get marked down by reviewers but in practice so few people play online (except in some genres where it is obviously crucial) that the effort would have been better spent on the singleplayer game. The mainstream simply don't cover games enough or with enough expertise given the size of the paying public.

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

A comment about the Xbox's optional RF cable in the supplement supplied with **E**108 got me thinking. "The option true **Edge** readers not only should avoid, but despise vehemently," you wrote. What is a 'true' **Edge** reader? I take it to mean someone who is passionate about games. However, since some of my consoles are hooked up to my television using the standard RF cables they came bundled with, it seems I, despite fitting the above description, am not a true **Edge** reader.

It's not that I use these leads because I like them, it's simply a matter of financing. Basically, if I can only afford either a SCART lead or a game I'd rather buy the game and put up with inferior picture and sound quality. Surely this makes me no less of a gamer than some snotty little rich kid whose parents buy him all the latest equipment?

Of course, it's not an issue with Xbox since it comes with a SCART cable but I decided to bring this to your attention as it is an example of an understated elitism that is sometimes evident in **Edge**'s pages. Don't get me wrong, I think the magazine is leagues ahead of any other in the videogame sector but sometimes I feel you're a little snooty.
Ben Foster

Perhaps it's a question of differing priorities. Inferior picture and sound quality can make a tremendous difference to the videogaming experience. Playing games through an RF (we are talking RF and not composite, right?) connection simply doesn't fully unlock the potential of your pastime. If you owned a Ferrari, would you drive everywhere at 30mph?

I gather that *Metal Gear Solid 2* has received its fair share of criticism among punters for being too short. I too have found the game a bit brief, I'm not a particularly skilled gamer, but I finished it in four days, at three hours per day.

The thing is, I adore *MGS2*, not just for its gameplay, but the plot, which shows that while the videogame world has yet to reach the diversity of the movie industry, it has come a long, long way from the 'rescue your girlfriend' plots of yesteryear. The length of the game raises an interesting question however. If game plots are supposed to provide interesting political or artistic messages, the objective of which is surely to get these messages into the hands of as many people as possible, do the games have to be short for less skilled gamers, so that the right message can come across as easily as possible? If *MGS2* had no plot to speak of, it would merely be an interesting diversion, but if the game was made artificially longer by adding about three extra, practically impossible bosses, I would give up on it. It seems to me that for a plot-based game to really succeed, it has to offer not only an engrossing storyline, but also a diversity of enthralling experiences, and not alienate the casual gamers.
Chris Charlton

Three weeks in, and the doomsayers are already predicting an early death for Xbox. I suspect that this sort of talk is rather premature considering what is to come in the next year on the machine. I also find it slightly ironic that the same PS2 early adopters who begged for Sony's effort to be given a year in the marketplace before judgement are first in the queue for the stoning of Microsoft's console.

Even at this early stage, it has the games to compete. Price seems to be a sticking point for many. Microsoft must have realised that the largest surges in PS2 sales occurred around price-drops. If Microsoft is intending on making its profit on the software, it must believe in the mantra that more systems in homes equals more potential software sales. To this end it must take the hit now to reap the rewards later on.

Ultimately it would be naive to expect Xbox to outsell PS2, so I'm sure all that Xbox owners would like is for the machine to last for its intended lifespan, with a large proportion of the major multiplatform titles, and a couple of dozen really good exclusives.
James Woodhead

I've noticed a trend in game previews over the last few of months, and I honestly think that it's about time. No longer are previews there solely to generate hype and sell games, which they inevitably will, but to actually point out potential flaws which need to be corrected before a game launches. If just one publisher or coding team takes notice, then the world will be a better place. This is not a new industry – there are almost 30 years of great games to look back on for inspiration. In reality we should be learning from the mistakes of the past, and every new game or piece of software that appears should be an all-time classic. But it isn't. Why?

Sure, there is plenty of room for innovation, *MGS* invented a genre, with so many little touches that it really was approaching gaming nirvana, but *MGS2* was flawed by its abundance of cut-scenes and untranslatable storyline (when I finished the game, I was greeted with a 45-minute video in which I had absolutely no idea what was going on. Maybe that was just me, though). So why isn't someone making an *MGS*-style game, with just the right balance of interaction/cut-scene/innovation?

I'll tell you why. For too long we have bought substandard games, instead of just ignoring the trash. People want to buy games, and they will. If only they listened when you told them not to. *Ico* is probably one of the greatest modern adventures on the PS2, but its release coming just two weeks after *MGS2* has all but destroyed its chances of being remembered.

This is not a new industry, but people treat it like it is. The kids that were bought a computer at an early age by thoughtful and forward thinking parents have grown into the designers and programmers, and indeed adult gamers of today. We all remember the classics, hence the trend for 'retrogaming' that has swelled over the last few years. Plagiarism, to a certain extent, should be encouraged within the industry – everyone loved *Elite* – fine make a decent, updated, *Elite* clone for the Xbox. Sell millions. Just don't release it until you have the opinions

"Ironic that the same PS2 early adopters who begged for Sony's effort to be given a year in the marketplace before judgement are first in the queue for the stoning of Xbox"

Edge's Making of... *Chuckie Egg* appears to have uncovered Nigel Alderton, the game's creator, who is understandably keen to set the record straight

of a few people who aren't on your payroll.

Broken Sword on the GBA? That's just lazy. You could have written *Broken Sword III* and sold four times as many copies. *Batman: Vengeance* on the Xbox and GameCube? Why? It didn't sell on the PS2. Why didn't it sell? Because it wasn't very good. A new *Army Men* game? Don't even go there, sister. What astounding new features will *Die Hard* have that will make me buy it over *Halo*?

EA have been listening to the press. *Knockout Kings 2002* has learned from the mistakes of the 2001 edition. Will the next *Fifa*? *Pro Evolution* has the best gameplay, everyone who has played it has said so, but it looks like a pig on the menu screens. A malformed pig who has been beaten with an ugly stick. Daily. For a couple of years. Learn from your mistakes. A simple (dare I say it) *Fifa*-style menu would have been so much better.

Gameplay over graphics is an old excuse, which still holds weight. Look at your wives/girlfriends – it's the same personality over looks argument. Everyone has their ideal partner, so the points I've raised here not everyone will agree with, but I believe that the tide is turning – no longer will we have to buy the games we are told to by magazine adverts or shop staff. We have a choice – we can vote with our feet, and decide the future of whole companies, just by saying no.

Everyone, in retrospect, just has to listen. The coders must listen when we point out their flaws. Constructive criticism, if you will. And consumers must listen, when told a game is bad, or they'd be better off spending their hard-earned cash in the nearest drinking establishment.

Trevor Hill

I wrote the original version of *Chuckie Egg* for the Spectrum in 1983. I designed the game, did all the programming, drew the (dodgy) graphics, created the sound effects – everything. So I was rather surprised to read an interview with Doug Anderson in the April edition of **Edge** in which he claimed that the game was mainly his design. Rubbish! The game was all but complete before he even saw it. He did make some daft suggestions about changes to the game – which I ignored – then he converted the game to the BBC and other machines.

Nigel Alderton

We did try to contact you, Nigel, but you proved rather elusive. Apologies for the confusion.

Re: Learning Curve feature in **E**109. Interesting article. Although I feel it misses the point of why electronic entertainment is not worthy of academic study. The simple reason is, there is nothing there to study which isn't demonstrated to a far greater degree by other entities.

For example, the effects of world wide consumption of a single product (globalisation), are embodied so much more strongly in other commodities. Similarly, our disposable society and the way that contempory humans seek instant gratification, McDonaldisation, is put on display to a greater degree elsewhere.

Don't get me wrong, I enjoy wasting a few hours on my PlayStation2 but let's not kid ourselves here. Computer games are consumed by a relatively small number of people and as such will never be as significant as the pill, September 11, Karl Marx or instant telecommunications.

Paul Ross

Throughout its lifespan, **Edge** has always championed the development of the totally non-linear gaming experience. And, at first, this principle was fresh and appealing; taking as long as you wish to get from A to B became a major development in game design. However, I didn't get games such as *Tomb Raider*, *Zelda* on N64, and other such 'roaming adventures'. I want B to come to me; not to have to undertake an expedition to reach the next stage in the game, often failing to create tension and emotion.

Many of the games of the last five years have ultimately left me yearning for a return to the confines and claustrophobia of linear games, that are more appealing to the hardcore of the gaming community. Sadly, it is true that they just don't make them like they used to. I also feel that in ten years' time, Nintendo will have done a Sega and shifted to developing games only – wouldn't that be for the best?

Paul Powell

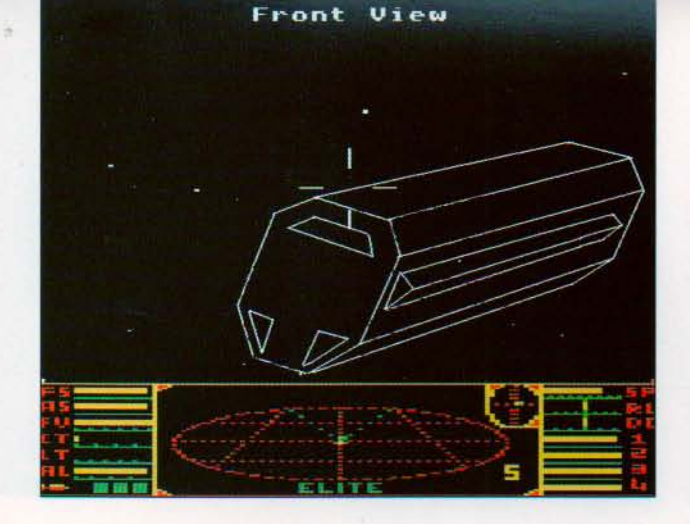
I don't recall there being an **Edge** pullout to herald the UK launch of the Dreamcast or PS2, nor do I expect a company like Nintendo will fund such shenanigans. Where then, did the budget for the extraordinarily pro-Xbox pullout come from? Some mysterious multinational benefactor? Perhaps the same place the dollars came from to fill all the Game and EB stores in the UK with 'display-only' Xbox merchandise.

Apart from running a business which clearly has to turn a profit, I hope your first loyalty is to your readers, and that you will respond to this clearly and not at all evasively. Your considerable integrity depends upon it.

Stuart Boldt

You mean apart from the N64 (**E**43), PlayStation (**E**58), Dreamcast (**E**67) and PS2 (**E**83) supplements? Timing constraints aside, **Edge** has a tradition of celebrating either the NTSC or PAL launch of a console in this manner. The very nature of these ensures they are enthusiastic – it's new hardware, for goodness sake, an opportunity for different, possibly better software. Furthermore, given that they are separate entities to **Edge**, the editorial environment within tends to be more akin to what you'd find in a (decent) singleformat mag. However, editorial integrity remains intact unless you see the words 'in association with' anywhere, which obviously indicates an advertising feature.

"I wrote the original version of Chuckie Egg for the Spectrum in 1983. Doug Anderson did make some daft suggestions about changes to the game – which I ignored"



Jim is convinced *Elite*'s Generation ship doesn't exist. Look, here it is. How can you think anyone would have quickly made this up in Photoshop?

I'm writing to add my own perspective to the censorship of games debate. I believe that the games industry has taken the only possible path, the same as the film industry, age ratings. A company releasing two versions of a game, one with adult content, one without wouldn't work for most games, as suggested by Paul Johnson and Jay Smith. Take *GTAIII*, once you remove the adult content, you are left with a game where you can wander round a city filled with cars and people, and that's it. You can't get in a car, as that would be theft, and you can't do any of the missions as they all revolve around crime.

What follows is an account of events I witnessed in my local games shop, which I think shows what the real problem is.

I was browsing through the pre-owned PS2 games, which happen to be near the counter in my local games shop, when a 15–16-year-old boy with his mum went up to the counter to pay for *GTAIII*. The assistant looked at the boy and said, "I'm sorry I can't sell you this as you aren't 18." The boy turned to his mum and without him saying anything his mum said to the assistant, "That's okay, I'll get it."
Assistant: "Do you realise this is an 18-rated game, it contains things that might not be suitable for your son."
Mum: "What sorts of things?"
Assistant: "Violence, crime, murder, drugs, prostitution, theft, that sort of thing."
Mum: "No, that's fine I'll take it."

The assistant processed the sale and the mother and son left. It was at this point that I noticed the next group in the queue, a mother with her son of about ten-years-old, and even younger daughter, probably five or six. The mum is holding a copy of *GTAIII*.
Assistant: "Is this for your son, here?"
Mum: "Yes."
Assistant: "This is an 18-rated game, it's not really suitable for a young child."
Mum: "I'm sure it's okay, it's only a game."
Assistant: "It contains violence, killing, drugs and prostitution, it's really not for children."
Mum: "That's fine."
The assistant doesn't look happy, but processes the sale.

I couldn't believe it, I had a quick chat with the assistant while I purchased a game. Apparently, this sort of thing happens all the time. Parents, don't listen, they assume that since it's a game, it must be for children. You could probably write in big orange letters on the front of a game, "This will turn your children into mindless killing machines," and a parent would still buy it for their kid. What really gets me is the second woman, not only would her ten-year-old son be playing the game, but her five-year-old daughter would probably be watching. Irresponsible parents – the bane of games developers and film makers everywhere.

My parents carefully monitored exactly what games I bought and what videos and films I watched until I was about 16, when they decided I was responsible enough to take care of myself. It's a shame not everyone's parents do the same.
Ming Tregonning

Last month D Halliday wrote to you regarding CEX not importing or exchanging Nintendo hardware and software. I was surprised that there has not been a reaction by yourselves since you cater for the hardcore market. If one does, the rest will follow. Then what will happen? Yours and CEX's views on this matter will be appreciated.
Darren Townsend

While **Edge** can understand Nintendo's decision in light of the SCEE vs Channel Technology court ruling (see **E**108) – aspects of which **Edge** expects to be overruled before too long – to extend this to include second-hand copies of games running on dead NCL systems seems petty and entirely unnecessary. Particularly when, one assumes, the company has no intention of re-releasing said software. Someone at CEX care to comment?

Doesn't it seem that the big retailers have little respect for their customers? Featured titles (the latest EA licensed garbage ad nauseam) are one thing but the issue of system choice is where they become irritating. At the time of the Dreamcast launch the manager of one of my favourite indie shops mentioned that the retailers were getting £40 (20 per cent, and remember that at the Japanese PlayStation2 launch the margin was 2 per cent) per unit. But instead of taking the money that was offered as an olive branch the large retailers blindly advised customers to wait for PS2 and then pointed out that *Tomorrow Never Dies* was on sale.

The point is that retailers behave like children over GameCube pricing, they show a level of respect for customers that is appalling. Stores that sell items above MSRP, believing customers don't notice aren't even the worst of it. My local chain store sold most of the official Nintendo accessories for GBA £5 above retail, and at the proper pricepoint were the generic link cables and lights that normally sell several pounds below. I heartily wish that there was something Trading Standards could do.
Simon Parsons

Shame on you Edge, bringing up that old Easter chestnut again. At the risk of looking like a sad BBC Micro geek, I've been through every byte of *Elite* and extracted all the ship models – and I'm not the only one – and there ain't no Generation ship. 'Fraid you've been taken in by a fake screenshot (dead giveaway: that ship is non-convex, the *Elite* engine can't handle non-convex models). The original Beeb *Elite* was missing the missions because there simply wasn't enough memory. The disc version only squeezed them in using overlays and dynamic loading of models.
Jim

You clearly haven't played the game properly, Jim. Fake screenshot, you say? It first appeared in **E**88 (p153), so it has to be genuine. Odd to find it in the April issue, though, isn't it?

> "You could probably write in big orange letters on the front of a game, 'This will turn your children into mindless killing machines,' and a parent would still buy it for their kid"





Concept hopes that someone will soon step forward as the Max Weber of videogames, while Choddo suffers from *Ico*-induced vertigo

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (www.futureforums.co.uk/edge/)

Topic: **Academics: taking videogames from behind?**
Poster: **Welsh**
While game studies can take a cold, detatched and horribly reductive viewpoint over the things that we see as special, emotional and soulful, it's a means to an end. For starters, it's validating the discipline on a far wider scale. Surplus to that, it helps to regulate acceptance within society.

Of course, academic study isn't essential to the propagation of a media, but it does give some kind of credence to the fact that gaming can run the entire gamut from lowbrow to high. The pop industry thrives despite being relatively theory-free (but, strangely, very formulaic) – academia isn't necessary – but it does prevent from pop being nothing but throwaway bubblegum.

Why are people worried that gaming is somehow going to be hijacked, cauterised and castrated by academia? That hasn't happened with the movie industry. Sure, there's plenty of pretension and over-analysis with regards to cinema, but the study of the medium has equipped us, all of us, with a better vocabulary and mindset for understanding movies, which in turns allows for the exploration of more flexible, challenging and intricate subject matter.

Academics won't surgically study the fun out of gaming, or somehow amputate the 'soul' of it. They won't transform the pastime into the exclusive preserve of wanky, mimsy, polo-necked procrastination.

If people want to read between the lines, and go deeper than you need or want as a gamer, then I don't think it's worth begrudging them. Just make sure you're happy.

Poster: **Mr_W**
As the **E**109 article points out, the academic study of games may be of equal or greater benefit to other fields, especially the theory, psychology and design of user interfaces. This is an area where the need for greater understanding and improved practice is pressing, as the ubiquity and power of computer applications leapfrogs our ability to efficiently manipulate them.

Poster: **Welsh**
Should current media studies shuffle up to create some space for it, lend gaming some of its own furrows, or should games strive to carve out their own individual space? A synthesis of both is the best way to go (in a narratologist versus ludologist stylee).

Poster: **Concept**
Both viewpoints are flawed. For example, narratologists can't effectively explain or justify games like *ISS* or *Super Monkey Ball*, while the ludologists can't do the same with either the likes of *MGS2* or *Max Payne*. There has to be a middle ground somewhere. A third viewpoint that can combine both viewpoints. Come on, who is going to volunteer to be the Max Weber of videogames?

Topic: **Are videogames culturally relevant?**
Poster: **Blokey35**
The question itself is stupid. Would you argue whether or not cinema is culturally relevant? Or fiction? Or art? Or architecture? Or even cooking? The list is endless. Everything created by a society is inherently influenced by the culture of that society. Games are no exception.

Some accuse gaming of merely killing time, and say it's only a way of losing the self. Games do not kill time, no more so than reading a book, or watching a film. Playing a game is often far more engaging than any of the more mainstream media. A nine to five desk job kills time. Carrying out the same menial tasks five days a week, forty-four weeks a year, for half your life is killing time. The power and scope of the human imagination is incredible, and videogaming is just another tool that we can use to share our ideas, stories and experiences with others. In this respect, it's as important as any other medium you can think of.

In the end though, I suppose it doesn't matter whether the mainstream media consider gaming culturally relevant. If they don't, we'll just do what we've done since videogaming first came into existence. We make our own culture.

Topic: **Ico's freaking me out**
Poster: **Choddo**
Every time I close my eyes, I get vertigo. There should be a mental health warning on the box.

Poster: **Sordel:**
I've only just started it – about an hour in – but the thing that unsettles me about the game is how much you care about Yorda being captured. Usually in games the person who dies is the hero, some toughnut who has placed himself (or, in Ms Croft's case, herself) into danger in the first place. With Yorda she's such a cowardly drip that you really feel sorry for her. Anyway, I had to take a break to ease my conscience.

"The power and scope of the human imagination is incredible, and videogaming is just another tool that we can use to share our ideas, stories and experiences with others"

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Minority groups and gaming

THE AWARDS ISSUE

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